# Al-Mīzān

*An Exegesis of the Qur'an*

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

Translated by: Alexander Khaleeli

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***In the Name of Allah,***
***the Beneficent, the Merciful.***

*All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds;*
*the Beneficent, the Merciful;*
*the Master of the Day of Judgment;*
*Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech*
*for help;*
*Guide us in the straight path;*
*The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed*
*favors,not of those against whom Thou art*
*wrathful, nor of those who are astray.*

*O' Allah! send Your blessings to the head of*
*Your messengers and the last of*
*Your prophets,*
*Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.*
*Also send Your blessings to all Your*
*prophets and envoys.*

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## Arabic Transliteration Key

| Arabic Letters | Transliteration | Arabic Letters | Transliteration |
|---|---|---|---|
| ا | ā | ع | ʿ |
| ب | b | غ | gh |
| ت | t | ف | f |
| ث | th | ق | q |
| ج | j | ك | k |
| ح | ḥ | ل | l |
| خ | kh | م | m |
| د | d | ن | n |
| ذ | dh | ه | h |
| ر | r | و | w/ū |
| ز | z | ى | y/ī |
| س | s | ء | ʾ |
| ش | sh | ة | ah |
| ص | ṣ | ـَ | a |
| ض | ḍ | ـَ | i |
| ط | ṭ | ـُ | u |
| ظ | ẓ | | |

## Publisher's Note

To enhance the readability of the text for English-speaking readers, the editors have opted to employ English names for the prophets and figures (including those listed below and others) and to utilize Anglicized terms that are now recognized in English dictionaries.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ādam | Adam | Mūsā | Moses |
| Dāwūd | David | Sulaymān | Solomon |
| Hārūn | Aaron | Shuʿayb | Jethro |
| Ibrāhīm | Abraham | Yaʿqūb | Jacob |
| ʿĪsā | Jesus | ʿAyyūb | Job |
| Isḥāq | Isaac | Yūnus | Jonah |
| Ismāʿīl | Ishmael | Yūsuf | Joseph |
| Jibrāʾīl | Gabriel | Zakariyyā | Zachariah |
| Lūt | Lot | ʿUzayr | Ezra |
| | | | |

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imāms, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

## Foreword

In this segment of *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, we delve into the interpretation of the subsequent twenty-four verses of Surah Hud, followed by an exploration of the initial sixty-two verses of Surah Yūsuf. While the previous volume provided a comprehensive introduction to Surah Hud, our primary emphasis in this introduction will be on Surah Yūsuf.

Surah Yūsuf, the 12th chapter of the Holy Qur'an, occupies a unique and revered place among the sacred texts of Islam. Its narrative richness, moral depth, and spiritual significance have captivated the hearts and minds of believers for centuries. In this introduction, we embark on a journey through Surah Yūsuf, guided by the profound insights of ʿAllāmah al-Tabātabā'ī, in his monumental work, *Tafsīr al-Mīzān.*

Surah Yūsuf is distinguished within the Qur'an for several reasons. It is one of the few chapters entirely dedicated to a single narrative, offering a comprehensive account of the life and experiences of the Prophet Joseph (Yūsuf). Unlike other chapters that incorporate various twhemes and teachings, Surah Yūsuf provides an unbroken narrative, which serves as a timeless tale of trials, tribulations, and divine providence.

ʿAllāmah al-Tabātabā'ī's approach to interpreting Surah Yūsuf reflects his deep commitment to unraveling the layers of meaning within the Qur'an's verses. He emphasizes the moral, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of this chapter, inviting readers to explore its profound teachings and reflect on their relevance to their own lives. As we delve into the depths of this chapter, we will uncover the wisdom and insights that ʿAllāmah al-Tabātabā'ī has meticulously distilled from the Qur'an's verses.

### The Context of Surah Yūsuf:

Before delving into the narrative of Surah Yūsuf, it is essential to consider the context in which this chapter was revealed. Surah Yūsuf is commonly categorized as a Meccan chapter, meaning it was revealed in the earlier period of the Prophet Muhammad's mission, during his time in Mecca. This context is significant because it sheds light on the themes and messages of the chapter.

The Meccan verses primarily address the themes of *tawhid* (the oneness of God), the call to monotheism, and the rejection faced by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his followers from the Quraysh tribe. Surah Yūsuf, however, differs from the Meccan chapters in that it does not directly address these themes. Instead, it presents a narrative that carries universal lessons transcending the immediate historical context.

Some narrations suggest that four verses of Surah Yūsuf are Medinan, including three at the beginning of the chapter. These Medinan verses indicate the broader context and relevance of the chapter, as they are intertwined with the Meccan verses. The presence of both Meccan and Medinan elements within Surah Yūsuf underscores its timeless message and applicability to various contexts and situations.

**The Uniqueness of Surah Yūsuf:**

Surah Yūsuf is exceptional within the Qur'an for its narrative structure. While the Qur'an contains numerous stories and parables, no other chapter provides such a detailed and continuous account of a historical narrative as Surah Yūsuf. From its beginning to its end, Surah Yūsuf presents the life journey of Prophet Yūsuf, allowing readers to follow his experiences, challenges, and ultimate triumph.

Moreover, Surah Yūsuf is unique in that it is exclusively dedicated to this narrative. Unlike other chapters that incorporate various stories or teachings, this chapter focuses solely on the life of Prophet Yūsuf. This singularity underscores the profound lessons and wisdom contained within this narrative, as it explores the complexities of human relationships, morality, faith, and divine intervention.

**The Story of Prophet Yūsuf:**

The central narrative of Surah Yūsuf revolves around the life of Prophet Yūsuf, a figure revered in Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. His story is one of remarkable patience, resilience, and unwavering faith in God, despite facing adversities that would have crushed most individuals. As we journey through Surah Yūsuf, we will encounter the various phases of his life, each offering valuable insights and lessons.

The story begins with the young Yūsuf, who is gifted with prophetic dreams. He dreams of eleven stars, the sun, and the moon prostrating to

him, a vision that foretells his future greatness. His dreams foreshadow the trials and tribulations he will face, as well as the ultimate fulfillment of his divine destiny.

However, Yūsuf's brothers, consumed by jealousy and resentment, plot against him. They conspire to get rid of him and cast him into a well, leading him to believe that he has been abandoned by his own family. This act of betrayal and cruelty marks the beginning of Yūsuf's arduous journey.

Miraculously, Yūsuf is rescued from the well by travelers and sold into slavery in Egypt. He is bought by a noble Egyptian named Al-Aziz, who recognizes Yūsuf's exceptional qualities and grants him a position of trust and authority in his household. Despite facing the trials of slavery and separation from his family, Yūsuf maintains his faith and integrity.

The narrative takes an intriguing turn when Al-Aziz's wife attempts to seduce Yūsuf. His steadfast refusal to engage in sin leads to false accusations against him. Despite his innocence, Yūsuf is imprisoned, where he remains for several years. It is within the confines of the prison that Yūsuf's character and faith continue to shine, as he interprets the dreams of his fellow inmates and demonstrates his unwavering trust in God.

One of the most poignant moments in the narrative occurs when Yūsuf interprets the dreams of two of his fellow prisoners, who are in the same jail. One dreams of pressing grapes to make wine, while the other dreams of carrying bread on his head, with birds eating from the bread. Yūsuf predicts that the first prisoner will be released and the second will be executed. His interpretation proves accurate, and Yūsuf requests the released prisoner to mention his case to the king in hopes of securing his own release.

The dream interpretation eventually reaches the king, who has been troubled by a recurring dream involving seven fat cows being devoured by seven lean ones and seven green ears of corn and seven dry ones. Intrigued by Yūsuf's interpretation, the king sends for him. Yūsuf explains that there will be seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine and offers a plan to manage the food supply during the coming crisis. Impressed by his wisdom, the king appoints Yūsuf as his advisor, granting him a position of great authority in Egypt.

Back in Canaan, Yūsuf's family, including his father Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob), endures years of hardship and suffering due to the famine.

Eventually, Yūsuf's brothers journey to Egypt in search of provisions, unknowingly coming face-to-face with their estranged brother. Recognizing Yūsuf but unaware of his true identity, they seek his assistance.

What unfolds is a poignant reunion that reveals Yūsuf's magnanimity and his unwavering commitment to forgiveness and reconciliation. He conceals his identity at first, testing his brothers' sincerity and remorse. Once convinced of their transformation, he reveals himself to them, and they prostrate before him, fulfilling the vision he had seen in his childhood.

This climactic moment marks the resolution of years of separation, betrayal, and hardship. It is a testament to the power of forgiveness, compassion, and divine providence, as Yūsuf forgives his brothers and urges them to bring their father and entire family to Egypt, where they will find refuge and sustenance during the ongoing famine.

The story of Yūsuf concludes with his reunion with his father Ya'qub, who had lost his eyesight due to years of mourning his beloved son. Upon receiving the news of Yūsuf's survival and his invitation to Egypt, Ya'qub's eyesight is miraculously restored. This symbolic restoration of vision encapsulates the themes of hope, faith, and divine mercy that permeate the narrative.

**Themes and Lessons from Surah Yūsuf:**

Surah Yūsuf is replete with profound themes and lessons that resonate with readers across cultures and generations. ʿAllāmah al-Tabātabāʾī's exegesis unveils these themes, offering insights that deepen our understanding of this captivating chapter.

Divine Providence: At the heart of Surah Yūsuf is the theme of divine providence. It underscores the belief that God is the ultimate orchestrator of events, and everything happens according to His divine plan. Despite the seemingly adverse circumstances Yūsuf faces, his unwavering faith in God's wisdom and providence guides him through the darkest moments of his life.

Resilience and Patience: Yūsuf's resilience and patience in the face of adversity serve as powerful examples for believers. His ability to endure betrayal, slavery, and imprisonment without losing hope or faith demonstrates the strength of his character and unwavering trust in God's plan.

Family Dynamics: Surah Yūsuf delves into the complex dynamics of

family relationships, including sibling rivalry and parental love. It serves as a reminder of the importance of compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation within families.

Morality and Integrity: The chapter highlights the moral and ethical values upheld by Yūsuf. His steadfast refusal to engage in sin, even when tempted, showcases the importance of moral integrity and adherence to ethical principles.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation: The climactic reunion between Yūsuf and his brothers is a testament to the transformative power of forgiveness and reconciliation. It underscores the Quranic message of compassion and the possibility of redemption.

Dreams and Interpretation: Dreams play a significant role in Surah Yūsuf, emphasizing their role as a means of divine communication and guidance. Yūsuf's ability to interpret dreams accurately reflects his connection with God and serves as a recurring motif in the narrative.

The Unity of Divine Message: ʿAllāmah al-Tabātabāʾī's exegesis underscores the interconnectedness of Qur'anic narratives. He emphasizes that Surah Yūsuf is not an isolated story but an integral part of the Qur'an's broader themes and teachings. It serves as a microcosm of the Qur'an's comprehensive message, highlighting the unity and coherence of its verses.

**ʿAllāmah al-Tabātabāʾī's Insights:**

ʿAllāmah al-Tabātabāʾī's commentary on Surah Yūsuf enriches our understanding of this chapter in profound ways. His meticulous analysis and spiritual depth provide readers with valuable perspectives on the themes and lessons contained within the narrative.

One notable aspect of his commentary is his emphasis on the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the Qur'an. He reminds readers that Surah Yūsuf is not merely a historical account but a profound reflection of the human soul's journey towards God. Through his commentary, readers are encouraged to contemplate the significance of divine wisdom and providence in their own lives, fostering a deeper connection with the narrative.

Additionally, ʿAllāmah al-Tabātabāʾī's commentary serves to bridge the gap between the historical context of the chapter's revelation and its timeless relevance. He adeptly weaves together the Meccan and Medinan elements of Surah Yūsuf, highlighting the universal messages that transcend

the specific circumstances of the time. This approach reinforces the chapter's enduring significance and applicability to various contexts and situations.

Furthermore, his commentary underscores the unity of the Qur'an's message. He demonstrates how Surah Yūsuf harmonizes with the broader themes and teachings found throughout the Qur'an. By exploring the interconnectedness of Qur'anic narratives, he reinforces the coherence of the Qur'an's verses and their collective impact on the reader.

**Conclusion:**

As we embark on this journey through Surah Yūsuf, guided by the profound insights of ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, we are invited to explore the depths of this captivating chapter. Its narrative richness, moral depth, and spiritual significance continue to inspire and guide believers worldwide. Through ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī's meticulous scholarship and spiritual insight, readers are offered a unique opportunity to engage with Surah Yūsuf on a profound level.

May this exploration of Surah Yūsuf, rooted in the wisdom of ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī, be a source of enlightenment, inspiration, and spiritual growth for all who embark upon it. As we delve into the verses of Surah Yūsuf and reflect on its timeless lessons, may we find solace, guidance, and profound meaning in this sacred narrative—a narrative that resonates with the enduring power of divine revelation to illuminate our path and offer wisdom in our journey towards God.

Ali Khalfan
Tawheed Institute Australia Ltd.
December 2023

# Chapter 11

## Sūrah Hūd

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بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

*In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate*

### Verses 100-108

This section of verses refers back to stories of the prophets recounted above, providing a holistic overview of them that expounds God's habit of dealing with His servants and the destruction in this world and eternal punishment in the Hereafter that are the consequences of idolatry for wrongdoing nations, as a lesson for the attentive.

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ذَٰلِكَ مِنۡ أَنۢبَآءِ ٱلۡقُرَىٰ نَقُصُّهُۥ عَلَيۡكَ مِنۡهَا قَآئِمٞ وَحَصِيدٞ ١٠٠

(11:100) These are from the accounts of (*min*) the townships which We recount to you. Of them there are some that still stand, and some that have been mown down.

The demonstrative pronoun, '*These*' refers to the stories recounted above. The use of the preposition *min* conveys the meaning of portioning (*tabʿīḍ*). In other words: 'What we recounted to you here is just a portion of accounts about the townships, regions, and their inhabitants.'

*Of them there are some that still stand, and some that have been mown down*—Here, God invokes the metaphor of agricultural crops, where some are still standing and others have been harvested.

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If this refers to the cities themselves, it suggests that some of the cities whose stories We have related to you are still standing, their remnants not destroyed. For example, the cities of Lot's people, at the time their story was revealed in the Qur'an, as stated: *Certainly We have left of it a manifest sign for a people who apply reason* (29:35), and: *And indeed you pass by them at dawn and at night. So do you not apply reason?* (37:138). Then there

some others that have been completely erased, their landmarks obliterated, such that not even ruins remain—like the cities of Noah's people and ʿĀd.

On the other hand, if it refers to the inhabitants of these cities, it means that some of these nations and peoples are still standing, their ruin not yet complete, like Noah's and Ṣāliḥ's nations. And some have had their end decreed by God, like Lot's people, from whom only Lot's family was spared, and Lot was not originally one of them.

وَمَا ظَلَمْنَاهُمْ وَلَٰكِنْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ۖ فَمَا أَغْنَتْ عَنْهُمْ آلِهَتُهُمُ الَّتِي يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ لَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُ رَبِّكَ ۖ وَمَا زَادُوهُمْ غَيْرَ تَتْبِيبٍ ﴿١٠١﴾

(11:101) We did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves. Of no avail to them were their gods whom they would invoke besides Allah, in any wise, when your Lord's edict came, and they did not increase them in anything but ruin.

This means that God did not wrong them by inflicting divine punishment on them and bringing about their destruction following their idolatry and transgression. Rather, they wronged themselves when they committed idolatry and forsook any obedience to God. If there is an action and there is a punishment prescribed for it, one of the two must be unjust, either the act itself or the punishment it warrants. If the punishment is not unjust, then the action that brings the punishment must be unjust.

In short, the meaning is: 'We punished them for their wrongdoings.' Therefore, the statement, *Of no avail to them were their gods whom they would invoke besides Allah …*, based on the arrangement of the verse, means: 'We seized them with punishment and their gods, whom they invoked besides God to bring them good and protect them from harm, did not avail them in the least when God's edict came to pass and they were sentenced to His punishment … *or* when their Lord's punishment upon them became due.'

*… and they did not increase them in anything but ruin* (tatbīb)—*Tatbīb*, derived from *tabb*, means to devastate something (*tadmīr*) or annihilate it (*ihlāk*). Its original meaning is to 'to cut.' This is because their worship of idols was a sin for which they were deserving of punishment. And when they tasted God's punishment and violence, they turned to

their idols and pleaded with them for relief. However, this supplication to their idols was also a sin, so it only served to intensify their punishment and make the penalty harsher for them. Hence, it did not increase them in anything except ruin.

Attributing their ruin to their gods is an example of metaphorical language, as, in reality, it refers to their supplication to these gods, which is the action of the one who is supplicating, not the one who is being supplicated to.

وَكَذَٰلِكَ أَخْذُ رَبِّكَ إِذَا أَخَذَ الْقُرَىٰ وَهِيَ ظَالِمَةٌ ۚ إِنَّ أَخْذَهُ أَلِيمٌ شَدِيدٌ ﴿١٠٢﴾

(11:102) Such is the seizing of your Lord when He seizes the townships that are wrongdoing. Indeed His seizing is painful, severe.

The demonstrative pronoun '*such*' serves as a reference to past events, specifically to the accounts of the towns presented above, which are some instances of God's retribution. In this verse, the unlimited divine punishment is being compared with the punishment inflicted upon them, stating: 'His retribution is universally painful and severe.' This statement is an example of a simile that compares a general idea to particular instances of it, indicating that the predication it reflects is not solely applicable to the instances mentioned but rather is general, encompassing all individuals. This is a common type of simile. The statement, *Indeed His seizing is painful, severe*, serves to explain the basis of the simile, which is the pain and severity of His punishment.

Therefore, the meaning of this passage is as follows: 'Just as God Almighty punished earlier wrongdoing nations—such as the peoples of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, Shuʿayb, and Pharaoh—with a severe and painful punishment, so too will He punish the rest of the wrongdoing towns when He seizes them. Those who reflect should draw a lesson from this.'

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّمَنْ خَافَ عَذَابَ الْآخِرَةِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ يَوْمٌ مَّجْمُوعٌ لَّهُ النَّاسُ وَذَٰلِكَ يَوْمٌ مَّشْهُودٌ ﴿١٠٣﴾

(11:103) There is indeed a sign in that for him who fears the punishment of the Hereafter. That is a day on which all mankind will be gathered, and it is a day witnessed.

The demonstrative pronoun '*that*' refers to what God has informed us about the stories of those wrongdoing towns that He seized with a severe and painful punishment on account of their misdeeds. Here, He informs us that His punishment of the other wrongdoers will be likewise painful and severe, and says that this is a sign for those who fear the punishment of the Hereafter and an indication that God Almighty will seize the criminals for their crimes after they die. His punishment will surely be severe and painful, which means that people should draw a lesson from this and take precautions against bringing down God's wrath upon themselves.

*That is a day for which all mankind will be gathered* (yawmun majmūʿun la-hu al-nās) means that the day on which the punishment of the afterlife occurs is a day when people will be gathered. Therefore, the demonstrative pronoun '*that*' is a reference to the day indicated by the mention of the punishment of the afterlife. According to some commentators, it is for this reason that it is used in the masculine form (*dhālik* instead of the feminine *tilka*), but it could also be that the demonstrative is used in the masculine to match its predicate ('*day*', which is also masculine).

The description of the Last Day as a day '*for which all mankind will be gathered*' (which is an adjectival construct) rather than saying 'people will gather for it' (*sa-yajmaʿu la-hu al-nās*), is to indicate that the gathering of people is one of the day's definitive characteristics, which it possesses inherently without needing to be associated with it through a predicate.

The distinctive characteristic of this day is that people are gathered for it, and the *lām* in *la-hu*, indicates purpose. Therefore, this day has a purpose that can only be achieved by gathering humankind in a way that leaves no one absent. Equally, people have a role which connects each one of them to the totality. In doing so, the first intermingles with the last and the last with the first, and all are mixed with some and some with all. This role is the reckoning of their deeds in terms of faith and disbelief, obedience and disobedience, and generally in terms of happiness and misery.

It is clear that a single action of a single human being is derived from all his previous actions related to his internal states, and all his subsequent actions also depend on his heart's condition. Similarly, one's action is related to the actions of the rest of his species in terms of influencing others and being influenced by them. Similarly, the deeds of the first generations are related to the deeds of the later ones, and the deeds of the later

generations are related to the deeds of the previous ones. Among the earlier generations are the leaders of guidance and misguidance, who are responsible for the deeds of the later ones, and among the later ones are the followers and dependents, responsible for the delusions and conceitedness of their predecessors. God Almighty says, *We will surely question those to whom the messengers were sent, and We will surely question the messengers.* (7:6), and He said, " *Indeed it is We who revive the dead and write what they have sent ahead and what they left behind, and We have figured everything in a manifest register* (36:12).

Divine retribution, then, inevitably follows from God's decisive judgement.

And this matter, as described here, only comes about when a group of people gathers in such a way that none are excluded.

From this, it appears that the issue of individual human beings in their graves and their recompense therein with some form of reward or punishment—as indicated by the verses of the Qur'an on the isthmus (*barzakh*) and detailed in the reports from the Prophet and the Imams of the Household of the Prophet —is distinct from what God Almighty has told us about the account on the Day of Resurrection and the recompense decreed therein in the form of eternal Heaven or Hell. What awaits a person in the isthmus is the completion of the record of their deeds, to be kept in store for the Day of Judgement. And what they experience there in the isthmus, whether in the form of a paradise or a fire, is but a precursor to the final judgement and recompense that awaits them thereafter. What is there is not a complete accounting, nor a final judgement, nor a full recompense. This is hinted at in verses such as *the Fire, to which they are exposed morning and evening. And on the day when the Hour sets in Pharaoh's clan will enter the severest punishment* (40:46), and *they are dragged into scalding waters and then set aflame in the Fire* (40:71–72). The first verse describes their punishment as being exposed to the fire, and then on the Day of Resurrection, entering it fully, which is described as '*the severest punishment*'; while the second verse speaks about their being punished by being dragged through boiling water and then being set aflame in the Fire.

Consider the verse about those slain in the way of God: *rather they are living and provided for near their Lord, exulting in what Allah has given them out of His grace, and rejoicing for those who have not yet joined them*

*from behind them that they will have no fear, nor will they grieve* (3:170). This verse is explicitly about the world of the grave that comes before the Day of Judgement, as it does not mention a reckoning or an eternal paradise, but it mentions some enjoyments generally.

Now consider the verse: *When death comes to one of them, he says, 'My Lord! Take me back, that I may act righteously in what I have left behind.' 'By no means! These are mere words that he says.' And ahead of them is a barrier until the day they will be resurrected* (23:99–100). This verse says that, after death, people find themselves in an interstitial life that exists between the worldly life, which is play and amusement, and the afterlife, which is the real life. As He says: *The life of this world is nothing but diversion and play, but the abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life, had they known!* (29:64).

In summary, the earthly life is the realm of action, the intermediate realm (known as *barzakh* or the isthmus) is the domain of preparation for the final judgement and recompense, and the afterlife is the domain of judgement and recompense. As God has said: *on the day when Allah will not let the Prophet down and the faithful who are with him. Their light will move swiftly before them and on their right. They will say, 'Our Lord! Perfect our light for us, and forgive us!* (66:8). They arrive there, with the light they earned in the earthly life, which they prepared in the intermediate realm, and then, on the Day of Resurrection, they ask for the completion of their light and the removal of whatever remains upon them of the world of diversion and play.

The phrase, *and it is a day witnessed* (11:103), appears to follow on from the previous sentence, *That is a day for which all mankind will be gathered*, because the gathering of people on that day necessitates the presence of witnesses. However, this phrase does not only refer to humankind. The fact that it is used without any qualification suggests that this is a day witnessed by all of those who have the capacity to witness: humans, angels, and jinn alike. There are many verses indicating the presence of the jinn and devils and the presence of the angels on the Day of Judgement, and these support the most general meaning of witnessing that we have mentioned here.

وَمَا نُؤَخِّرُهُ إِلَّا لِأَجَلٍ مَعْدُودٍ ﴿١٠٤﴾

(11:104) And We do not defer it but for a determinate term.

This means that there is a set time for that day, which God has ordained not to occur before its due time. Now, God judges, and none can repeal His judgement or resist His decree, therefore it must come to pass. Note that, according to the verse, God only delays the Day of Judgement for a preordained period, so when the time is complete and the term arrives, His decree is realized, and the day sets in.

يَوْمَ يَأْتِ لَا تَكَلَّمُ نَفْسٌ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِۦ ۚ فَمِنْهُمْ شَقِىٌّ وَسَعِيدٌ ﴿١٠٥﴾

**(11:105) The day it comes, no one shall speak except by His leave. Some of them will be wretched and some felicitous.**

The pronoun '*it*' in *'the day it comes*' refers back to the '*determinate term*' mentioned in the previous verse. In other words, on the day when the determinate term, to which the resurrection has been deferred, comes, no soul will speak except by His permission. As God has said: *Whoever expects to encounter Allah, Allah's time will indeed come* (29:5).

Some, like al-Ṭabrisī in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, have understood '*the day it comes*' as a referring to '*the day* the Resurrection and divine recompense *comes*', based on the fact that the previous verse also refers to these. However, this is a rather tortuous reading of the verse, and one which is not necessary given the explanation we have presented.

Others, such Rashīd Riḍā writing in *al-Manār*, have read the verse as meaning, 'at the time that particular day arrives, no rational soul will speak except by God's permission.' Therefore, the intended meaning of 'day' in the verse is a time in the general sense of the word, rather than a specific duration thereof, because this is the time when a the specific day described in the verse will come to pass, and this specific day is what the pronoun '*it*' refers to in '*the day it comes*.'

However, this reading is incorrect because it necessitates that 'the day' (in the sense of 'the time') be an adverb for 'the day' (the specific day, or the Day of Judgement), which essentially reduces the meaning of the verse to 'at the time when that particular time comes' or 'the day when that particular day comes.' Now, while one could differentiate between the two days to make one of them specific and the other general (as Rashīd Riḍā does in his commentary), this does not help to avoid the problematic implication of something being an adverb for itself, and time (which is an adverb

in itself) being the adverb for another time. After all, this is impossibility that cannot be resolved by merely changing the wording.

Distinguishing between 'day' in the general sense and 'day' in the specific one results in a purely conceptual distinction that does not provide any substantive value for our understanding of the verse. This is because, when we say 'the day when the specified day arrives', the first and second days both refer to the same thing, as they are co-extensive with one another.

However, it can happen that a specific time is associated with an event that occurs during that time, such that the time itself can be spoken of as one event among others. This negates its adverbial aspect, and then such a time is considered the adverbial for another time. For instance, one might say: 'The Day of Sacrifice during the month of Dhū al-Hijja' and 'The Day of Ashura in the month of Muharram.' As God says, *and when the Hour sets in* (22:55). So, if this specific concern is valid in the verse, it is possible that the pronoun '*it*' in '*the day it comes*' refers to the day itself.

***... no one shall speak except by His leave* (lā takallamu nafsun illā bi idhni-hi)**—This means that no soul amongst those assembled will speak except by the permission of God. Note that the verb *takallamu* was originally *tatakallamu*, but the first *ta-* was omitted, as is a common convention in the Arabic language.

The preposition *bi* in *illā bi idhni-hi* ('except by His leave') signifies accompaniment. Therefore, in reality, the exception applies to the speech rather than the speaker. This is evident in His saying, *None shall speak except whom the All-beneficent permits* (78:38). The implication here is that no soul will utter anything unless its speech is accompanied by His permission, unlike worldly speech in which one can say whatever they please, whether or not God has granted them moral permission to do so.

The attribute, namely no soul will speak except by His permission, is mentioned as one of the special characteristics that define the Day of Resurrection. Yet, it is not exclusive to it. Indeed, no soul ever speaks, nor any incident occurs, except by His permission, without this being specific to the Day of Resurrection.

It has been mentioned in some of our previous discussions that the majority of the distinctive qualities of the Day of Resurrection presented in the Qur'an are not, in fact, limited to it alone. This includes the verses: *The day when they will emerge, nothing about them will be hidden from Allah*

(40:16); *... a day when you will turn back, not having anyone to protect you from Allah* (40:33); *It is a day when no soul will be of any avail to another soul and all command that day will belong to Allah* (82:19).

There are other verses besides these also.

However, none of these qualities are unique to the Day of Resurrection. After all, it is obvious that nothing is ever hidden from God, nor can anything ever offer protection from Him, and neither does any soul have power over any other except by His leave, and He has eternal authority over creation and command.

However, something else becomes apparent when we contemplate on other verses.

For example, God quotes His own speech on the Day of Resurrection: *'You were certainly oblivious of this. We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is acute today'* (50:22); And the speech of the guilty ones: *'Our Lord! We have seen and heard. Send us back so that we may act righteously. Indeed we are now convinced.'* (32:12); *On the day when We gather them all together, We shall say to those who ascribe partners, 'Stay where you are—you and your partners!' Then We shall set them apart from one another... There every soul will examine what it has sent in advance, and they will be returned to Allah, their real master, and what they used to fabricate will forsake them* (10:28–30).

Reflecting on these verses, we note that the Day of Resurrection is an event in which God will assemble His servants and remove the curtains and veils that are in front of them, thereby revealing truths fully, and unveiling what is behind the cover of the Unseen in this creation. At this point, there will be no longer any doubt or hesitation in their breasts, nor will any whisper of disbelief stir in their hearts. They will witness utterly that God is the Manifest Truth, they will see that all power belongs to God, and that dominion, protection, command, and control belong to Him alone with no partner having any share in them.

The system of causes and effects, which they once perceived as existing independently of God, now cease to exist, severing the links and dissolving the causal relations between different things. At this point, the stars of causation scatter and the constellations that previously guided their suppositions in their darkness vanish. No sovereign retains any independent rule, no person of authority or power has anything to reinforce their status, no

object has a refuge or sanctuary to which it can turn or with which it can take shelter in order to seek its protection. There is no veil that can hide one thing from another or obscure it. Every matter is under the control of the One, All-dominant God, and no one else possesses sovereignty.

This is the meaning of His saying: *The day when they will emerge, nothing about them will be hidden from Allah*; His saying: ... *not having anyone to protect you from Allah*; and His saying: *It is a day when no soul will be of any avail to another soul and all command that day will belong to Allah*. This is reflected in many other verses of the Qur'an, all of which all deny the illusions with which people's minds adorn this worldly existence, which is nothing more than diversion and play. Indeed, in their conjectures, these causes assume the meaning of causation, and are garbed with the attributes of sovereignty, authority, power, protection, honor, and dignity in a genuinely independent manner. They are considered the givers, the preventers, the beneficial, and the harmful, with no goal beyond them and no goodness apart from them.

Based on this, we can infer the real meaning of His saying: *The day it comes, no one shall speak except by His leave*. This meaning is reiterated in other verses with similar phrasing such as His saying: *None shall speak except whom the All-beneficent permits and who says what is right* (78:38), and His saying: *This is a day wherein they will not speak* (77:35).

This is because God describes this Day in the following terms: *on the day when the secrets are examined* (86:9), and: *whether you disclose what is in your hearts or hide it, Allah will bring you to account for it* (2:284). Thus, it is evident that the reckoning on the Day of Resurrection is based on what is in peoples souls, of good and evil states and attributes, not what is revealed by means of discovery as is the case in this worldly existence.

Therefore, whatever is hidden beneath the veils of secrecy in this world, including the inner depths of human souls and the hidden aspects of peoples' hearts, will be revealed and stripped of any covering on the Day of Resurrection. What is unknown today will be evident tomorrow. The language we, as a society, use in our interactions, is nothing more than a series of sounds joined to one another. They point, as a matter of convention and thought, to meanings that reside in our consciousness. We adopt and exchange these sounds primarily due to our societal need to understand what is in the minds of others, due to our inability to perceive this directly

through our senses.

Our use of language is a societal mechanism to which we resort in order to reveal the ideas hidden in our respective consciousness. This mechanism allows us to express what lies within our minds that would otherwise be beyond human comprehension. Had we been endowed with a sense that enabled us to directly perceive intellectual meanings in the same way as our sight enables us to perceive light and colors, or the way our touch enables us to sense heat and cold, roughness and smoothness, then we would not need to fashion languages and communicate through them. There would be no words or speech among us. Similarly, if human life was solitary rather than social, there would be no concept of speech or even a seed of its existence.

This is because worldly life is composed of both what is perceivable and what is beyond perception—the visible and the Unseen. People are in dire need of revealing what is in their minds, their intentions, and having these understood by others. If we imagine a purely observable existence, where life consisted only of matters that could be perceived, there would be no need for speech and language whatsoever. If we were to apply the term 'speech' to any existing state in such a life, it would merely refer to some of what is in people's minds being made apparent to others, and those others becoming aware of it.

This kind of existence, characterized as such, is the existence of Resurrection Day, as God describes it in phrases such as *the day when the secrets are examined* (86:9). This is further evidenced by God's words: *On that day neither humans will be questioned about their sins nor jinn ... The guilty will be recognized by their mark; so they will be seized by the forelocks and the feet* (55:41). If you argue that, in such a scenario, there would be no sense in lies and deceit taking place there, the Qur'an affirms precisely the opposite in the following verse: *On the day when We gather them all together, We shall say to those who ascribed partners (to Allah) 'Where are your partners that you used to claim?' Then their only excuse will be to say, 'By Allah, our Lord, we were not polytheists.' Look, how they forswear themselves, and what they used to fabricate has forsaken them!* (6:22–24); as well as in the verse: *The day when Allah will raise them all together, they will swear to Him, just like they swear to you (now), supposing that they stand on something. Look! They are indeed liars!* (58:18).

**Author's comment:** This refers to the manifestation of inner

characteristics, just as a person, when thinking, perceives the depths of his own mind without needing to inform himself about his thoughts or reveal his innermost feelings to himself verbally. This is because he bears witness to his own inner self, not to something unknown or foreign to him. Nonetheless, he conjures an image of speech that signifies the meanings he perceives in his mind. Perhaps he even verbalizes these thoughts, articulating the components of the idea that crosses his mind with language. His motivation for doing so is his habit of speaking and pronouncing the thoughts that exist in his mind to others.

The polytheists and hypocrites portrayed in these verses, having grown accustomed to deceit and falsehood in their worldly life and having lived this life on the basis of such delusions, reveal their true nature on the day when inherent characteristics and traits of the soul became apparent. Otherwise, it is impossible to imagine a person standing before his Lord—God the Most High—who scrutinizes his inner and outer self, with his deeds clearly presented, his record laid bare, in the presence of witnesses, his body parts testifying to what they did while he was alive, and all the means to which a person might take recourse besides God—including lies—vanishing into nothingness, and his secrets made public, and yet he continues to lie in the hope of deceiving God, presenting a false, deceptive argument and hoping to escape through this.

This is like when, on the Day of Resurrection, they are commanded to prostrate themselves, but they are unable to do so. God says: *The day when the catastrophe occurs, and they are summoned to prostrate themselves, they will not be able to do so. With a humbled look (in their eyes), they will be overcast by abasement. Certainly, they were summoned to prostrate themselves while they were yet sound* (68:43). Their inability to prostrate is due to the fact that arrogance has become entrenched in their souls. Had it been due to God preventing them from doing so on that day, this would have been an argument in their favor against Him rather than an argument in His favor against them.

**Poser:** If it is as you say it is, and there is neither any need for speech nor any occurrence thereof, then what is the meaning of the exception in the verse, *no one shall speak except by His leave*, and other similar statements we find in the Qur'an? And why does God recount what they will say on the Day of Judgement in various parts of His Book?

**Reply:** There is no doubt that a person, in his existence, has a choice in his actions, including speech. He has an equal propensity to perform an action and to abstain from it, which are equivalent relative to him. When he commits an act, one of the options has inevitably been chosen. There is no choice after that. The inevitable consequences that follow from the action, including the recompense that the person has earned through the action, are just like the action itself after it has been realized in external reality—all follow inevitably from it.

Now, the Hereafter is a realm of recompense, not a realm of deeds. There, human free will does not exist; what remains is the individual and the actions they have performed, which are now inseparably attached to them as a matter of necessity. Along with these actions are the written records of their deeds, the witnesses to these deeds, and their Lord, to whom all matters return, and by whose decree all judgements are made. When summoned, they respond out of compulsion, as God says, *On that day they will follow a summoner in whom there will be no deviousness* (20:108). In the worldly life, they were called to the truth, but they did not respond.

If they are asked to speak in the Hereafter, their speech does not resemble the worldly speech which originated from their own free will and revealed what was hidden in their souls. Their mouths are sealed; there is no way for them to express what they wish. And how could they, when God has said, *Today We shall seal their mouths, and their hands shall speak to Us, and their feet shall bear witness concerning what they used to earn* (36:65), and " *This is a day wherein they will not speak, nor will they be permitted to offer excuses.* (77:35–36).

Excuses only make sense when it comes to recompense that involves an element of choice, for such recompense could either exist or not exist. However, the bad deeds that one has unquestionably committed, and the inevitable punishment that follows, cannot be a subject of excuses, because there is no choice involved. As God says, "*'O faithless ones! Do not make any excuses today. You are only being requited for what you used to do'* (66:7). In other words, your recompense is identical with the actions you have performed; no excuse or argument can change that. It would only be different if the recompense were taking place in this world and in the hands of a judge who can decide what they see as most appropriate.

In sum, if one speaks out of being asked on the Day of Resurrection, their speech is out of compulsion and aligns with their deeds, which have been made manifest and, therefore, cannot be hidden at all in that realm. If they lie in their speech, this would be nothing more than an expression of their innermost nature, as we have previously mentioned, and it would be considered one of their deeds that will be revealed—not a genuine response to a question. Their mouths will be sealed, and their hearing, sight, skin, hands, and legs will be made to speak. The deeds they have performed will be brought forward, the witnesses will testify, and God is a witness over everything.

To summarize all the preceding points, the meaning of God's statement, *no one shall speak except by His leave*, is that people's speech on that day will not be like their speech in this world. It will not be a voluntary disclosure of their inner thoughts that permits the speaker to either lie or tell the truth. This volitional control, which is an integral part of the realm of deeds (this world), is abolished in the Hereafter. A person has no free will in their speech because it is tied to God's permission and His will. If you contemplate deeply, you will find that the outcome of this feature—the removal of human free will concerning speech and all other actions, and the encompassing nature of compulsion—leads back to what we initially discussed: the characteristic feature of the Day of Resurrection is the unveiling of the realities of all things and the transformation of the Unseen into the seen.

We advise the reader to pay close attention to the insights offered by the divine discourse about the Hereafter, for it is a complex and profound puzzle.

Some scholars have suggested that the meaning of the phrase, " *no one shall speak except by His leave*, is that speech is only allowed if it is decent and permitted under religious law. People would naturally refrain from indecent speech in that realm, hence only decent and permissible speech occurs.

However, this is an arbitrary restriction of the verse's meaning. After all, as we have already discussed, the Day of Judgement is not a day of action to permit good deeds or forbid bad ones. The refuge here, born out of the circumstances of recompense rather than action, does not distinguish between good and bad actions, even though both are choices, because the

moral categories of good or bad can only apply to actions in which the person doing them has free will.

However, God Almighty says, *no one shall speak except by His leave*, and it is well known that presenting excuses is not in of itself a morally blameworthy act.

Other commentators have said that the meaning of the verse is that no one will speak beneficial words in the hereafter, such as words of intercession or mediation, except by His permission.

This reading of the verse understands it along similar lines to verses such as, *Intercession will not avail that day except from him whom the All-beneficent allows and approves of his word* (20:109). However, this also narrows the meaning of the verse without any evidence to support such a restriction. If this was indeed the intended meaning, it would have been more appropriate to say: 'no soul speaks on behalf of another soul or about it, except by His permission,' similar to His saying, *no soul will be of any avail to another soul* (82:19).

What we have presented above provides a way to reconcile verses that appear to affirm that people will speak on the Day of Resurrection with those that appear to deny the same thing.

This is as follows: The verses that concern the matter of speaking on the Day of Resurrection fall into two categories:

The first category denies speech or affirms it for all people without exception, as in His saying, *On that day neither humans will be questioned about their sins nor jinn* (55:39), and His saying, *The day when every soul will come pleading for itself* (16:111).

The second category denies any form of speech, whether truthful or false, as we see in the verse, *This is a day wherein they will not speak* (77:35), and His saying, quoting the wrongdoers: '*Now we have no intercessors, nor do we have any sympathetic friend*' (26:101).

Verses of the first category can be reconciled through reference to verses such as, *None shall speak except whom the All-beneficent permits and who says what is right* (78:38). While the apparent conflict between verses of the second category can be resolved by the verse presently under discussion, *no one shall speak except by His leave* (11:105). However, based on the explanation given above, this suggests that they are bound in their speech to say only what God permits: they cannot freely choose and express what

they wish as they could in this world. This is one of the unique attributes of the Day of Resurrection.

Based on this, the shortcomings of the explanation offered by Rashīd Riḍā in *al-Manār* become evident. For example, he says of the present verse: 'The denial that any speech will occur on that day, except by His permission, explains the reconciliation between verses categorically negating it and those affirming it. He had mentioned verses such as, *This is a day wherein they will not speak* (77:35), and, *Today We shall seal their mouths* (36:65).

However, the problems with his explanation are, first of all, that he failed to distinguish between the two different categories of verses on this topic. This suggests that the denial that any speech will take place except by God's permission, as mentioned in the present verse, suffices to resolve the apparent conflict between the different verses, which is not the case.

Secondly, he did not explain what it meant for someone to speak by God's permission, which means that the verse is presenting something as a unique feature of the Day of Resurrection, when this does not appear to be something exclusive to it.

One way to address this apparent contradiction is to say that the Day of Resurrection consists of situations where people are permitted to speak in some of them but not in others. And this reading is supported by some narrations.

However, while this answer might appear to differ from the previous one at first glance, it does not, in reality, eliminate the question of what is meant by God's permission, and essentially returns to it.

Another answer might be that what is meant by the absence of speech is that people will not speak with arguments sound, rather they will speak by confessing their sins. Some may also blame others, and some may ascribe sins to others. According to this reading, the phrase, *no one shall speak except by His leave* is a akin to telling someone who has spoken at length without presenting any convincing argument, 'You have not said anything.' Those who speak without presenting a sound argument are considered not to be speaking, because they do not meet the requirement of speech, which should include an argument. It is as though their speech isn't considered genuine speech. So the negation of speech refers to the dismissal of speech that serves no purpose besides making empty claims.

However, if this explanation was correct, it would only apply to verses such as, *This is a day wherein they will not speak* (77:35). However, in the case of verses like, *None shall speak except whom the All-beneficent permits* (78:38), it still does not solve the problem.

Another possible answer is the one presented by al-Alūsī[1], which he quotes from *al-Ghurar wa al-Durar* of Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, that the Day of Resurrection is an exceptionally long day. Hence, it is possible that speaking would be forbidden in certain times and places but permitted at others.

However, the problem with this explanation is that in referring to the Day of Judgement in terms of its length, it renders the meaning of the verse, *This is a day wherein they will not speak* (77:35) as 'This is a day wherein for a part of it they will not speak.' However, this reading of the verse contradicts its apparent meaning. The same problem arises with the second explanation, which focuses on the differing stages of the Day of Judgement. In fact, both of these explanations—that is the second and the fourth of those presented here—ultimately lead back to the same problem. The difference between the two is that the second one resolves the contradiction by distinguishing between different locations on the Day of Judgement, while the fourth one resolves it by distinguishing between different times therein, just as the third one resolves it by distinguishing between different kinds of speech—some beneficial and some not.

A fifth possible response can be derived from the claim some scholars make that the exception in the verse, *no one shall speak except by His leave* (11:105) is discontinuous. In other words, it means that no soul can speak of its own ability, except by God's permission. Essentially, this reading posits that the forbidden speech on the Day of Judgement is the speech that originates from human capacity, while the permissible speech is that which occurs by God's permission.

However, the problem with this is that human speech, like all other voluntary actions, does not solely depend on the capability of the human being. Instead, it is attributed to human capacity, which is itself derived from God's power and permission. So, whenever a human speaks or performs an action using their own capacity, this is produced through their

1 Translator's note: Maḥmūd Shihāb al-Dīn al-Ālūsī (1217–70/1802–1854), an exegete and jurist from an illustrious family of Sunnī scholars in Baghdad. His *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī* was a voluminous commentary on the Qur'an.

capability that is accompanied by God's permission. The meaning of the exception in this context is the elimination of all the factors contributing to speech on the Day of Judgement except for one, that is, God's permission.

Consequently, the exception is connected and goes back to what we initially proposed: The prohibited speech is voluntary, similar to worldly speech, while the permissible speech is that which is solely based on divine causation, which is with His permission and will. In the scenario the situation is one of compulsion and taking recourse to God. However, proponents of this explanation believe that the reason for this compulsion on the Day of Judgement is witnessing its horrors, as people, when faced with these horrors, are compelled to confess, admit, speak honestly, and follow the truth. We have already discussed that the reason for this is the situation being one of recompense rather than free-willed actions, and the fact that it is merely the unveiling of realities rather than the choice of human beings.

The passage, *Some of them will be wretched and some felicitous*, presents felicity (*saʿāda*) and wretchedness *(shiqāwa*) as two opposing states. The felicity of any being is to attain the goodness which completes its existence and brings it delight. For human beings, who are composed of both a body and a soul, this means attaining goodness according to both their physical and spiritual powers, experiencing pleasure and satisfaction from it. Conversely, their misery arises from the loss or deprivation of this goodness. These two states, as per common parlance, relate to the existence or non-existence of a trait (*malaka*), and the difference between felicity and goodness is that happiness is a specific good for a species or individual, while goodness is more general in nature.

The apparent meaning of the verse, *Some of them will be wretched and some felicitous*, does not indicate that all beings must fall exclusively into these two categories. However, it does fit with God's division of people into believers, disbelievers, and those who have diminished capacity, such as children and the mentally ill, or those who have not received clear guidance in this life. However, the main aim of these verses is not to categorise people according to their deeds and deserved outcomes, but to emphasize the nature of the Day of Judgement. It is a day when all people will be gathered and none will be absent, and it ends in either Paradise or Hellfire.

Those who are of diminished capacity may represent a third category, distinct from those who earn Paradise through their deeds and those who

deserve Hellfire through theirs. However, it is necessary that these individuals do not simply vanish or remain in an intermediate state of waiting forever. In the hereafter, they will ultimately join one of the two groups: the felicitous or the wretched, entering either Paradise or Hellfire. As stated in Sūrah al-Tawba: *others waiting Allah's edict: either He shall punish them, or turn to them clemently, and Allah is all-knowing, all-wise* (9:106). Therefore, the gathering of humankind on the Day of Judgement ultimately includes only these two groups: the felicitous and the wretched, with everyone being either one or the other.

This passage is similar to another verse in the Qur'an, *and warn of the Day of Gathering, in which there is no doubt, a part will be in paradise and a part will be in the Blaze* (42:8). Here, the statement, *a part will be in paradise and a part will be in the Blaze* implies exclusivity, especially in the given context, even though it doesn't necessarily imply so on its own.

The verse suggests that among the people gathered on that Day, some will be wretched, characterized by misery, while others will be felicitous, imbued with happiness. As for when these descriptors become firmly attached to the individuals and whether these attributes are inherent or determined by an irrevocable divine decree, or if they are established through personal actions and deeds, with the individuals originally free from either set of characteristics, the verse does not specify. However, the placement of the verse in the context of calling for faith and righteous deeds and urging people to choose obedience and avoid sin, indicates that the path to happiness or misery can be facilitated by one's deeds, as stated in Sūrah 'Abasa (80:20), *Then He made the way easy for him*.

From this, it becomes clear that there is a flaw in the explanation some scholars have offered for this verse. They believe that it shows that an individual's state of felicity or wretchedness is predetermined by God's decree. As stated by Fakhr al-Rāzī in his commentary on it: 'Know that God has already determined that some of the people of the Day of Resurrection are felicitous and others are wretched. If God has decreed thus, then it is impossible for it to be otherwise. Otherwise, it would mean that God's statement is false and His knowledge is ignorance, which is impossible. Therefore, it is established that the felicitous person does not turn into a wretched one, and the wretched person does not turn into a felicitous one.'

He further narrates a report that says 'Umar asked the Prophet after

the revelation of the verse, *Some of them will be wretched and some felicitous*: 'O Messenger of God, then why should we do anything? For something already predetermined or for something yet to be decided?' The Prophet replied, 'For something already settled, 'Umar. The pens have been lifted, and the scrolls have dried up, yet everyone will find it easy to do that for which they were created.' Al-Raẓi continues: 'The Mu'tazila say, citing a report from al-Ḥasan: "Among them, some are wretched due to their deeds and others are happy due to their deeds." We argue that these reports cannot refute the decisive evidence (*al-dalīl al-qāṭi'*) we have already presented.

Furthermore, there is no dispute that an individual is miserable due to his deeds and happy due to his deeds. But because these actions occurred by the decree and predestination of God, the argument we have presented remains valid.'

One of the extraordinary fallacies in this argument lies in what al-Rāzī terms 'decisive evidence.' There is an error in taking the time of the judgement as the time for its result and effect. It is obvious that a truthful judgement now about attributing a characteristic to a subject at a future time does not entail this attribution except at that future time, not at the time when the judge makes the judgement, which is now. For instance, our judgement that at night that the sky will grow brighter in a few hours—a true judgement—does not necessitate the sky being light at night when we make that judgement. Equally, our judgement that a boy will become an old man in eighty years does not require him to be an old man at the time of the judgement.

So when God says, *Some of them will be wretched and some felicitous*, God is informing us that a group of them will be wretched on the Day of Resurrection and others will be felicitous on the Day of Resurrection. If this is a judgement about their wretchedness and felicitousness, then it is a judgement made by Him now that they will be one or the other in future, on the Day of Resurrection. And it is assumed that this judgement will not change from what it is in its context, otherwise, it would mean that God's information is false and His knowledge is ignorance. However, this is not a judgement made by Him now that they are either wretched or felicitous now, or a judgement made by Him now that they are either wretched or felicitous permanently. This is self-evident.

After all, if al-Rāzī actually believes this, then what prevented him from making such a claim regarding everything that God Almighty has informed us about people's characteristics on the Day of Resurrection. Why not judge them as being either eternally believers or disbelievers, or being in Paradise before the Day of Resurrection, and in Hell before the Day of Resurrection? This is because his evidence applies equally to these and other cases, such as wretchedness and felicitousness.

As for the narration cited by al-Rāzī, in which the Prophet says, '... yet everyone will find it easy to do what they were created for', this has no relevance to what he mentioned in the first place. A clarification of this will come in our explanation of the narrations.

Finally, when al-Rāzī says, 'there is no dispute that an individual is miserable due to his deeds and happy due to his deeds. But because these actions occurred by the decree and predestination of God, the argument we have presented remains valid', he means that the divine decree's attachment to action necessitates its permanence. This would mean that the action is forced upon the person, not a choice in which with the performance or non-performance of the act are both equally possible for the person, and that they had no say in it and no influence on the action in bringing about wretchedness or felicitousness. In fact, according to this model, there is a purely coincidental association between the person and the action, and between the action and the consequence of either misery or happiness. In other words, all of these elements are linked merely by virtue of God's placing one thing after another, without any real causal connection between them or any influence on one another.

This is another fallacy arising from the confusion between the attribute of necessity and the attribute of contingency. The action has a sufficient cause (*'illa tāmma*) that necessitates its existence, such as the combination of the human will, the readiness of the means of action, the existence of material receptive to action, time, place, and the absence of obstacles and impediments, among other things. When all of these factors are gathered together, completed, and fulfilled, there exists a sufficient cause and the action's occurrence becomes an ontological necessity. Thus, the action has the attribute of necessity in relation its sufficient cause as a whole and the attribute of contingency in relation to each part of its sufficient cause, including the human will.

The action that is realized by the necessity of the sufficient cause, at this moment, has the attribute of necessity in relation to the sum of the sufficient cause (whose constituent factors are detailed above), and an attribute of contingency to the human will. The attribute of the action's necessity in relation to the sufficient cause does not negate its attribute of contingency in relation to the human will (which is a necessary cause, but not a sufficient one by itself), nor does it shift it from possibility to actuality. Rather, the action's relationship to the human being is always one of contingency, just as its relationship to the sum of the human and the other components of the sufficient cause is always one of necessity. The two possibilities of the performance and non-performance of an action are always equal with respect to the human being, just as one of the two possibilities of performance and non-performance is always determined with consideration to the sufficient cause.

Hence, we can conclude that human actions are voluntary in essence, as their existence cannot be devoid of a sufficient cause. The irrevocable divine decree is one of God's active attributes, which are abstracted from the station of action, which is a chain of causes arranged according to the cosmic order. Now, the ontological necessity of effects in relation to their causes, or that of every decreed thing in relation to its divine decree, does not contradict its voluntary nature of actions for human beings, and the relation of actions to human beings is one of contingency. Al-Rāzī has understood the relation of an act to human beings as one of ontological necessity rather than contingency, by assuming that an action being necessitated by the divine decree entails the necessity of its occurrence in relation to humans, rather than its mere contingency.

To put it another way, suppose that God had knowledge that a certain piece of wood will burn in fire, does this entail that the wood will necessarily combust, regardless of whether there is fire? No, because the truth of God's knowledge depends on the wood being burnt by fire, not it burning regardless of external factors. Similarly, God's knowledge that a human will perform a certain act out of his or her own free will and volition, or that he or she will suffer a certain consequence due to a voluntary action he or she has performed, necessitates the inevitability of the action through human choice, not the inevitability of a certain action regardless of whether the human being chooses to do it or not, or whether there is

a human being or not, which would sever the causal connection between the human and their action. Therefore, God's knowledge that a particular human being will suffer due to their own voluntary disbelief necessitates the suffering caused by their disbelief, not suffering regardless of whether there is disbelief or not.

Hence, it is clear that God's knowledge of human action does not necessitate the nullification of free will or the affirmation of predestination, even though His knowledge does not deviate from His decree, and there is no way to repel His decree.

فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ شَقُوا فَفِي النَّارِ لَهُمْ فِيهَا زَفِيرٌ وَشَهِيقٌ ﴿١٠٦﴾

(11:106) As for the wretched, they shall be in the Fire: their lot therein will be groaning and wailing (*zafīr wa shahīq*).

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī writes: "*Zafīr* denotes the beginning of a donkey's braying, and *shahīq* denotes the end of it."

In *al-Kashshāf*, al-Zamakhsharī writes: "*Zafīr* means the exhalation of breath, while *shahīq* means its inhalation."

In his *Mufradāt*, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says: "*Zafīr* refers to inhalation that causes the ribs to expand noticeably ... *shahīq* is the prolongation of this. Therefore, together *zafīr* and *shahīq* denote taking violent breaths in-and-out. God says, *their lot therein will be zafīr wa shahīq; they will hear it raging and roaring* (zafīr) (25:12), and *they hear it blaring, as it seethes* (67:7), and the root of the word *shahīq* is from *shāhiq*, which means 'a towering mountain.'"

As you can see, the meanings of *zafīr* and *shahīq* are very close to one another, and the verse here is using them figuratively. The intended meaning is that the wretched will suck air into to their lungs, then exhale it, lengthening their cries and groans due to the severe heat of the fire and the magnitude of the disaster and misfortune they have suffered, producing a sound similar to that made by a donkey when it brays.

At first glance, it seems that following from the statement, *Some of them will be wretched and some felicitous*, the present verse should have read: 'As for he who is miserable (singular), he is in the fire, and in it he has gasping and panting.' However, the prior context which opened with a description of the Day of Judgement, *That is a day for which all mankind will be*

*gathered, and it is a day witnessed*, which emphasized the fact that there would be a multitude of people gathered together. The implication of this is that there will be groups on that day: those who are miserable and those who are happy. Now, in the previous verse, God uses the term *wretched* (shaqī) and *felicitous* (saʿīd) in the singular and indefinite form because the prior expression in the same verse, *no one shall speak except by His leave*, also uses the singular indefinite form to convey the comprehensiveness of tis negation. However, once that aim has been achieved in the full verse, *The day it comes, no one shall speak except by His leave. Some of them will be wretched and some felicitous*, the discourse returns to using the plural form for the next three verses to emphasize the fact that there are many people gathered together: *As for the wretched ...*

خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا مَا دَامَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ رَبُّكَ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ فَعَّالٌ لِمَا يُرِيدُ ﴿١٠٧﴾

(11:107) They shall remain in it (*khālidīn fī-hā*) for as long as the heavens and the earth endure—except what your Lord may wish; indeed your Lord does what He desires.

This expounds the term that the inhabitants of Hell will serve therein, paralleling the following verse, *As for the felicitous, they will be in paradise. They will remain in it* (khālidīn fī-hā) *for as long as the heavens and the earth endure—except what your Lord may wish—an endless bounty* (11:108), which explains the term that the inhabitants of Paradise will dwell therein, and this supports the notion that both groups will reside permanently in these abodes.

Al-Rāghib says in his *Mufradāt*:

> "*Khulūd* (from whence *khālidīn* is derived) means for something to endure without being affected by corruption, and its remaining in the condition it is in. Anything that change and corruption are slow to effect, the Arabs describe as *khālid*, which is why they call stones used around their cooking fires *khawālid*. However, this is due to their long-lasting existence, not because they are genuinely perpetual or eternal. God says, *You set up structures as if you will be immortal* (takhludūn) (26:129)."

The term *khald* refers to whatever part of the human being remains

unchanged so long as they are alive, unlike the rest of his parts. The original meaning of the term *mukhallad*, is something that endures for a long time—for example, a *rajul mukhallad*, is a man who appears slow to show signs of ageing, or a *dāba mukhallada*, is an animal which does not lose all of its second set of teeth until its fourth set begin to show. Then, this came to be used metaphorically for something that endures eternally.'

Eternity in Paradise refers to the persistence of things in the state they are in without being affected by corruption. God says, *they shall be the inhabitants of paradise; they shall remain in it* (hum fī-hā khālidūn) (2:82); *such shall be the inmates of the Fire, and they shall remain in it* (2:81); *Should anyone kill a believer intentionally, his requital shall be hell, to remain therein* (khālidan fī-hā) (4:93).

Elsewhere, God says, *They will be waited upon by immortal youths* (wildān mukhalladūn) (76:19). It is said that *mukhallad* here means these youths will remain in their young state without ageing. Another interpretation states that it means they will be wearing a type of anklet called *khulda*.

The verb *ikhlād* means to make something last or believe that it will endure. Therefore, the verse, *but he clung to the earth* (wa lakinna-hu akhlada ilā al-arḍ) means that he relied upon the earth because he believed he would live on it eternally.

The phrase, *as long as the heavens and the earth endure*, is a phrase that qualifies the statement, *they shall remain in it*, in a way that emphasizes the meaning of perpetuity. The implication is that they will remain in that state for as long as the heavens and earth continue to exist. However, other verses of the Qur'an explicitly state that the heavens and earth will not endure eternally, while others still affirm that both Heaven and Hell will continue to exist without ending or fading.

Verses that affirm the former include: *We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them except with reason and for a specified term* (46:3); *The day We shall roll up the sky, like the rolling of the scrolls for writings. We will bring it back as We began the first creation—a promise binding on Us. That indeed We will do* (21:104); *... yet the entire earth will be in His fist on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens, scrolled, in His right hand* (39:67); And: *When the earth is shaken violently, and the mountains are shattered into bits and become scattered dust* (56:4–6).

Verses that affirm the latter include: *... gardens with streams running*

*in them, to remain in them forever. That is the great success.* (64:9); *Indeed Allah has cursed the faithless and prepared for them a blaze, in which they will remain forever. They will not find any guardian or helper* (33:64–65).

Therefore, two issues arise out two verses:

The first is the fact that they connect their perpetuity to the persistence of the heavens and the earth, which is not perpetual according to the above cited verses.

The second issue is that it links the eternal reality that begins on the Day of Resurrection—the fact that the two groups are in Heaven and Hell and destined to remain therein—with something whose existence ends on the Day of Resurrection—the heavens and the earth.

This second issue is more problematic than the first because it is relevant even to those who do not believe in eternity in either Hell or both Heaven and Hell, unlike the first issue.

The resolution to this dilemma lies in the fact that God, in His Book, mentions that in the Hereafter there are an earth and heavens, even if they differ from what we know in this world. God says, *The day the earth is transformed into another earth and the heavens, and they are presented before Allah, the One, the All-paramount* (14:48). He also states, relating the words of the inhabitants of Paradise, *They will say, 'All praise belongs to Allah, who has fulfilled His promise to us and made us heirs to the earth, that we may settle in paradise wherever we may wish!' How excellent is the reward of the workers* (39:74). And He describes the believers, saying, *For such will be the reward of the ultimate abode* (13:22).

Thus, the Hereafter has its heavens and earth, just as it has a Heaven and Hell, each with its own inhabitants. God the Sublime describes all of these as being with Him, stating, *That which is with you will be spent but what is with Allah shall last* (16:96). With these words, He decrees that they are everlasting and not fleeting.

God links the permanence of Heaven and Hell and their inhabitants to the persistence of the heavens and earth because the heavens and earth, in their general sense (in that they will be transformed into a new heavens and a new earth in the hereafter), are eternal and not transient. However, these heavens and earth that we experience in this world will come to an end based on the observable order. As for the heavens that shade Heaven, for instance, and the earth that carries it, which are illuminated by the

light of their Lord, they are permanent and never fading. The universe will never be devoid of them. In this way, both of the aforementioned dilemmas are resolved.

In *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*, al-Zamahsharī alludes to this perspective, saying: "The evidence that there are heavens and earth in the Hereafter is His saying, *The day the earth is transformed into another earth and the heavens* (14:48) and His saying, *and made us heirs to the earth, that we may settle in paradise wherever we may wish* (39:74). This is because the land of the Hereafter must have something beneath it and something above it, either a heaven that God creates or the Divine Throne that overshadows it. Anything that overshadows something else can be referred to as a *samā'*."

However, the second perspective al-Zamakhsharī mentions appears nonsensical, as it establishes the existence of the heavens and earth in relative terms, namely that both Heaven and Hell must conceptually have an 'above' and a 'below.' Thus, Paradise and Hell are primary in existence, while their heavens and earth are secondary. According to this conceptualization, the permanence of their heavens and earth is determined by the permanence of Paradise and Hell, not the reverse, which is what is indicated in the verse. This perspective necessitates that Heaven and Hell must have an earth beneath and a heaven above them. However, regarding the heavens in the plural form (*samāwāt*), as in the verse, this argument does not apply, leaving the complication regarding the heavens unresolved.

The above refutes the explanation given by al-Qāḍī al-Bayḍāwī[1] in his commentary, in which he says: "This point of view is problematic because it draws a comparison with something that most of creation does not recognise in terms of its existence and permanence. And for those who recognise it, they understand it only in terms of the continuation of reward and punishment, so the analogy doesn't hold value for them."

What he means by this is that the verse draws a parallel between the permanence of Paradise and Hell and their inhabitants with the persistence

1 Translator's note: al-Qāḍī Nāṣir al-Dīn ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar b. Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī al-Bayḍāwī (d. 719/1319), was a scholar of the Shāfiʿī legal school, the Ashaʿrī theological school, and a commentator of the Qur'ān. His commentary, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl* was one of the most popular commentaries in the pre-modern Sunnī world. The Shīʿī scholar Fayḍ Kāshānī also refers to it in his commentaries on the Qur'an, *al-Ṣāfī* and *al-Aṣfā*.

of the heavens and the earth. If the heavens and earth in the verse refer to those of the Hereafter, and most of the creation doesn't recognise their existence and permanence, then this analogy would be trying to explain what is clear by comparing it to something obscure, which violates the rules of rhetoric.

To this I respond: We only understood the permanence of Paradise and Hell and their inhabitants from the words of God, just as we have understood the existence of a heavens and an earth for them and the eternity of all of these from His words. So, what prevents someone from defining one revealed truth in His words in terms of another found in His words, especially if one truth is better known among the people than the other after both have been taken from His words and not from an external source?

This also refutes what al-Ālūsī has said concerning the same topic, that what comes to mind from the heavens and the earth are the familiar celestial bodies we know and that, therefore, it is more fitting to seek another explanation for the verse other than the one presented.

The reason what we have said refutes al-Ālūsī's statement is that the meanings of Qur'anic verses are based on the understanding of competent speakers of the language concerning the general connotations that are conveyed by the lexical meaning (*lugha*) and common usage (*'urf*) of words. However, regarding the specific intents and the particular realities upon which these connotations operate, this is not the case. Instead, the preferred approach is to contemplate upon the Qur'an (*tadabbur*), which God has commanded, and returning the ambiguous verses to the clear ones, and comparing one verse with another, because the Qur'an confirms some parts of itself with others, and some parts speak, prove, and validate the others, as we find in the traditions. Hence, when we hear God describe Himself as 'One, Unique, Omniscient, Omnipotent, Living, Willing, Hearing, and Seeing' or other attributes, we should not understand them based merely on the apparent meanings determined by the common usage of the Arabic language, but based on what the very words of God explain and what deep contemplation reveals to us about their meanings. We have already discussed this in our discourse on the clear and ambiguous verses in our commentary on *Sūrah Āl 'Imrān*.

Other explanations of the verse have been offered in various traditions and in the commentaries of other exegetes. We will detail what we have

found of these here, following on from the first explanation, given above.

The second explanation is that what is meant by the heavens are the heavens of Paradise and Hell and their earth—meaning whatever it is that shades them and whatever it is they rest upon. Anything that is above and shades them is considered a heaven (*samā'*), and whatever your foot rests upon is considered an earth (*arḍ*). In other words, what is meant is whatever is above them and what is below them.

This is the explanation that al-Zamakhsharī proposed at the end of the section of his commentary we quoted above, and the reader is aware of the problems inherent in it, as this explanation does not make clear why the term 'heavens' (*samāwāt*) is mentioned in plural in the verse, rather than the singular, as we have already noted.

The third explanation is that *as long as the heavens and the earth endure* means 'as long as the Hereafter exists,' and it is eternal, just as the permanence of the heavens and the earth in this life is determined by the extent of their lifespan. Perhaps the intended meaning of the phrase *as long as the heavens and the earth endure* is a as a simile, just as one might say, 'He spoke the words of one who mocks', meaning he spoke in the same manner as those who mock and ridicule.

However, if this sort of simile was what was intended by the verse, it would convey the opposite of the desired meaning, which is impermanence. And if something other than this was intended, the phrasing of the verse would not suffice.

The fourth explanation is that it the phrase is intended to convey the meaning of 'a very long time'—in the sense of eternity—rather than to actually specify the duration of the heavens and the earth's existence. The Arabs have numerous expressions they use to convey perpetuity, without meaning the literal sense of those expressions. For example, they would say, 'The matter will remain thus, as long as night and day continue to alternate,' or 'as long as the east wind blows,' or 'as long as stars rise,' or 'as long as breezes blow,' or 'as long as the heavens exist.' They turned to these phrases, assuming that these things are eternal and unending. They then used them as if they were coined to convey the idea of perpetuity.

However, the problem with this explanation is that the Arabs only used these expressions to convey the meaning of eternity—and frequently did so—because they believed these phenomena were indeed eternal. On

the other hand, if there is someone who explicitly states that they have a limited and finite existence and believes that considering them as only existing temporarily is an essential doctrine of faith, then it is inappropriate for such a person to employ such phrases to convey the meaning of eternity, no matter the context. How could it be otherwise when God has said, *We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them except with reason and for a specified term* (46:3)? How then could it be correct to say that heaven and hell will exist eternally '*as long as the heavens and the earth endure*'?

The fifth explanation is that it means they will live so long as the heavens and the earth (whose end is known) endure, after which God will extend their existence, granting them eternal life and perpetuating their state. This is akin to saying, 'They will live for such-and-such number of years,' after which God adds to that an immeasurable span of time, as in the verse, *to reside therein for ages* (78:23), meaning they will live for ages, and then they will be given an even longer term than that.

However, the problem with this perspective is that it appears to be based on interpreting some phrases, such as, '*as long as the heavens and the earth endure*' as denoting a specified period of time, while reading others, such as, '*except what your Lord may wish*,' as signifying a limitless duration. However, such an explanation requires the reader to make assumptions that have no basis whatsoever in the text itself.

The sixth explanation is that the reference to Paradise and Hell in this verse is to the paradise and hell of the intermediate realm (*Barzakh*). In other words, these will endure as long as the heavens and the earth endure. When the duration of the heavens and the earth comes to an end with the Day of Resurrection, people will be brought out of this temporary paradise and temporary hell and mustered for final judgement.

However, this reading does not accord with the context of the verses, which start by mentioning the Day of Resurrection and describing it with certain attributes. This discourse begins by mentioning '*a day for which all mankind will be gathered*' and '*a day witnessed*' on which '*no one shall speak except by His leave*', and then highlights its most specific and distinctive qualities, namely the clear descriptions of reward and punishment in the eternal Paradise and Hell. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that, after all of this, such a discourse would then divert to discussing the temporary

paradise and hell of the intermediate realm.

In addition to this, God describes the punishment of *Barzakh* as being exposed to the Fire, not entering it: *the Fire, to which they are exposed morning and evening. And on the day when the Hour sets in Pharaoh's clan will enter the severest punishment* (40:46).

The seventh explanation is that entering Hellfire in his verse refers to being under the influence of Satan, while being in Paradise refers to being under the guardianship of God. This is because God's guardianship is made manifest in the Paradise of the Hereafter, in which the felicitous receive His blessings. By contrast, Satan's influence becomes tangible in the form of the flames of Hell, in which the wrongdoers are tormented on the Day of Resurrection. This is supported by those verses that discuss the tangible manifestation of people's deeds in the afterlife (*tajassum al-aʿmāl*).

Therefore, the wretched enter Hell because of their wretchedness, but they might be taken out of it if they receive God's blessings and grace, like a disbeliever who believes after his disbelief or a criminal who repents. Equally, the felicitous enter Paradise due to their felicitousness, but they might be led astray by Satan to cling to worldly desires, and follow their whims, like a believer who becomes a disbeliever or a righteous person who turns corrupt.

However, the problem with this reading is the same as what has already been mentioned, namely that it goes against the grain of this section of verses. These verses detail the unique, awe-inspiring, and astounding attributes of the Day of Resurrection that melt hearts and boggle minds upon hearing and reflecting upon them. They serve as a warning to the arrogant and deniers among the disbelievers and act as a deterrent for the sinful.

Therefore, it is highly improbable that the verses would mention that it is a day when all people are gathered, a witnessed day, and a day in which no one speaks unless permitted, and then mention that the disbelievers and sinners are in Hellfire from the moment they disbelieved and sinned until the Day of Judgement, and that the believers and those who perform righteous deeds are in Paradise from the moment they believed and acted righteously. Firstly, this account doesn't fit the context because the verses describe the unique features of the Day of Judgement, not what precedes and leads to it. Secondly, the verses are intended as warnings and glad tidings. Such concealed truths would not concern the arrogant and tyrannical

disbelievers; they would not value them, nor would they be deterred by fear of such misery or hope for such spiritual happiness, as should be obvious. However, this interpretation is still valid within the deeper layers of the Qur'an's meaning.

There are still other explanations of the verse, which revolve around the phrase, *except what your Lord may wish*, whose discussion we have eschewed here for the sake of brevity. They share common problems with the explanations proposed for this phrase, which we will detail below.

God's statement, *except what* (mā) *your Lord may wish*, is an exception to what was previously mentioned about the wretched dwelling eternally in the fire. It corresponds to the statement following the mention of the felicitous dwelling eternally in Paradise. The word *mā* in '*what your Lord may wish*' is commonly understood as being an infinitive modifier, which shifts the meaning of the phrase thus: 'unless your Lord wishes that they do not dwell therein eternally.' However, this reading is undermined by the subsequent phrase, *indeed your Lord does what* (mā) *He desires*, where *mā* is used as a relative pronoun (in the sense of 'whatever'), and the meanings of '*what your Lord may wish*' and '*what He desires*' should be one and the same.

Alternatively, the word *mā* in *except what your Lord may wish* can be a relative pronoun, signifying an exception to the duration that is understood from the context to be perpetual. This means that they will dwell in it for all future times, perpetually, *except* for *what your Lord may wish*. Or, the exception might relate to the collective pronoun in *they shall remain in it*. This means all of them will dwell therein except those whom God wills to remove from Hell and admit to Paradise. This aligns with reports that sinful and disobedient believers will not remain in Hellfire forever; they will eventually leave and enter Paradise due on account of receiving intercession. The exit of some people from Hellfire at a future time is sufficient to both preserve the general meaning of the verb while maintaining the validity of the exception.

One point that must addressed in this case is that the verse uses the relative pronoun *mā* ('what') to refer to rational beings (when it is commonly used for non-rational beings). However, there is no problem with this, even if it is not commonplace. We can find other examples of this usage in the Qur'an. For example: ... *then marry such women as you like* ... (4:3).

The explanation of the following verse, *As for the felicitous ...* (11:108), parallels that of the present one, as they both share the same context and structure. However, the exception, *except what your Lord may wish*, in the verse about Paradise is followed by the clause, *an endless bounty*. This indicates that the exception here does not concern the certainty that they will dwell in Paradise forever, as such an exception would not cohere with the fact that the reward of Paradise is an unending gift. On the contrary, it only points to the mere possibility of occurrence. Therefore, the meaning is: 'the people of Paradise will be there forever, unless God removes them from it. But the gift of Paradise is everlasting, and they will never leave, because God would never will such a thing!'

Thus, this exception serves to safeguard God's omnipotence. Indeed, God's power over them is not depleted by His admitting them to Paradise, His sovereignty is not nullified, and His kingdom does not fade. His omnipotence and control over time remains as they were before. To Him belongs the power to remove them from Paradise, despite His promise that they will dwell there permanently. However, He will not remove them due to this promise, for God does not break His promises.

Now, the discussion of the exception in the present verse (11:107), meaning the verse of Hellfire, is identical to that of the exception in the verse of Paradise, given the shared context and obvious parallels between the two verses in terms of structure. However, the difference is that God follows the exception of this verse with the phrase, *indeed your Lord does what He desires*, which carries an obvious indication that whatever He wills will certainly transpire.

Therefore, the inmates of the Fire, like the inhabitants of Paradise, will never leave, unless God wills so, because He is capable of all things. No action of His, whether conferring or withholding, can entail the negation of His power or the situation getting out of His control, for His power is absolute, unbound by any limitation, nor prevented from accomplishing one thing by another. He said, *and Allah does whatever He wishes* (14:27) and *Allah effaces and confirms whatever He wishes* (13:39), among other verses.

There is no contradiction between this explanation and what is narrated in the reports about some of the guilty being removed from the Fire by God's will, as should be clear.

This is one explanation of the exception, and there are other interpretations that are collectively summarized in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, up to ten. What we have outlined here is only the first of these.

The second explanation of the exception posits that it refers to an increase in punishment for the inhabitants of Hell and an increase in bliss for the inhabitants of Heaven. Thus, *except what your Lord may wish* could be understood signifying an increase beyond the established degree, just as a man might say to another, 'I owe you a thousand dinars, except (*illā*) for the two thousand that I loaned you at a particular time.' In this case, the two thousand would indeed be an addition to the original thousand. Here, the exception signified by the preposition *illā* takes the meaning of 'in addition to', as in 'in addition to what your Lord wills', akin to the phrase, 'No man was with us except Zaid', meaning 'in addition to Zaid.'

This view is built on the premise that God's statement, *as long as the heavens and the earth endure*, does not imply perpetuity or eternity, and the reader is already are of the arguments against this.

The third explanation is that the exception refers to their status at the place of Resurrection, as they are neither in Heaven nor in Hell, but rather in a state of limbo, known as the Isthmus (*Barzakh*), which lies between death and resurrection. For, if God had said 'they will abide therein forever', without making an exception, one might assume they would be in Hell or Heaven from the moment the verse was revealed or after their time of moral responsibility comes to an end. Thus, the exception serves a purpose here.

If it one was to ask, 'How can an exception be made from their dwelling eternally in Hell before they have even entered it?', the answer is that it is possible if this announcement is made prior to their entering it.

However, this interpretation has no basis in the wording of the verse, and it appears to be based on reading the previous statement, *some of them will be wretched and some felicitous*, as being an affirmation of some people being predestined to be wretched and others to be felicitous, without them having any free will or moral choice in the matter. The fallacy of such a reading should be obvious.

The fourth explanation sees the first of the two exceptions as connected to His saying, *their lot therein will be groaning and wailing*. Here, *except what your Lord may wish*, is assumed to refer to forms of punishment other

than these two types, with the exception not relating to the eternal duration of the punishment. Equally, for the inhabitants of Heaven, it is connected to an implicit corresponding meaning. It is as if God had said, 'They will have such a blessing therein, except what your Lord wills of other types of blessings.' This interpretation is implied by His saying, *an endless bounty*.

However, this reading assumes that the two exceptions belong to different contexts without any evidence for this. This is evident in the fact that it understands the first exception to mean 'in addition to', while it understands the second exception as a genuine exception. However, there is no evidence that the first exception is related to his saying *their lot therein will be groaning and wailing*, nor that *an endless bounty* implies what proponents of this reading claim. The latter verse only indicates the perpetuity of the gift, without specifying whether this means all types of gifts or only some of them.

Subsequently, one may inquire about the utility of distinguishing some types of blessings in paradise and exposing this to the listeners, given that the context is one of assurance and joyful news, and the circumstance is one of invitation and encouragement. This is among the most absurd aspects of the reading.

The fifth explanation is that *illā* ('except') means 'and', otherwise, the discourse would be self-contradictory. Therefore, the meaning of the phrases would be: 'they will dwell therein as long as the heavens and the earth endure, and as your Lord wills in addition to this.'

However, it has not been established that the particle *illā* can indeed be read with the meaning of 'and.' Indeed, this is something that has only been mentioned by the medieval grammarian al-Farrā', and it is an opinion that experts have considered weak. Furthermore, this reading is baed on the assumption that the phrase, *as long as the heavens and the earth endure*, does not convey the meaning of eternity or perpetuity, and the reader is already familiar with the debates concerning this.

The sixth explanation is that *the wretched* refers to those monotheists who have been consigned to Hellfire. They are those who have combined belief and obedience with acts of disobedience that necessitate their imprisonment in Hell. Therefore, God Almighty has said that they will be punished in Hellfire *except what your Lord may wish*, namely except when God removes them from it to take them to Heaven and reward them for

their acts of obedience.

As for the exception for the inhabitants of Paradise, it is an exception that applies to those monotheists who have been released from Hell and admitted to Paradise, because anyone transferred from Hell to Paradise and granted eternal life therein must be described as dwelling there eternally, but with an exception because they were elsewhere before they arrived. It is as if to say: 'they are in Paradise, and they will dwell therein forever, except what your Lord willed concerning the time they were consigned to Hell.'

According to the proponents of this reading, the wretched ones are identical with the felicitous ones, and both designations apply to them depending on their situation. When they are cast into Hell and punished therein, they are the wretched ones. However, when they are admitted to Paradise a granted its blessings, they are the felicitous ones. This explanation is attributed to the Companions Ibn ʿAbbās, Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh, and Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, as well as a group of the Successors.

However, this reading does not accord with the context, because God Almighty, after describing the Day of Resurrection as a day when people are gathered together, divided the people who will be gathered into two groups with his statement: *Some of them will be wretched and some felicitous*. It is obvious that his statement, *As for the wretched …*, and his statement, *As for the felicitous …*, each introduce a separate point, as evinced by the fact they begin with the prepositional phrase 'as for' (*fa ammā*), which indicates that what follows it is an exposition of the statement, *Some of them will be wretched and some felicitous*. Therefore, based on the fact that this statement is an exhaustive division of all the people gathered on the Day of Resurrection, this means that the wretched are all of the people of Hell, and not merely a particular group of them, and the felicitous are all the people of Paradise, and not only those who were freed from Hell and admitted to Paradise.

That is, unless one were to say that the phrase, *Some of them will be wretched and some felicitous*, is also a description of a specific group in the same vein as they claim that the phrases, *the wretched* and *the felicitous*, both refer to the same group. Read like this, the verse's meaning becomes: 'Some of those gathered on the Day of Resurrection will be both wretched and felicitous, and they are the ones who will be consigned to Hell and abide therein so long as the heavens and the earth endure, except when

your Lord wishes to bring them out from it, admit them to Paradise, make them felicitous therein, and cause them to dwell therein for as long as the heavens and earth endure, except for the time when they were wretched aforehand and dwelt in Hell before entering paradise.'

However, the problem we raised earlier would then apply to the purported meaning of His saying, *Some of them will be wretched and some felicitous*. The apparent context, which portrays the gathering of humankind as a whole on the Day of Resurrection, does not support the idea that His saying, *Some of them will be wretched and some felicitous*, refers to a specific group of people. As this would mean that this single group are then apparently divided into two groups to describe their situation while remaining a single group in essence, and presenting them in the form of two separate subjects for two separate categories, with two specific references to the endurance of the heavens and earth, followed by two separate exceptions that are intended to represent only one. If this were indeed what was meant by the verse, then what is the benefit of such a specification, when it leads to so much unnecessary ambiguity and complexity in the wording of the verses?

One could also argue for this reading by appealing to a more general meaning. For example, one might say that the phrase, *Some of them will be wretched and some felicitous*, is a general division of humanity on the Day of Judgement into those who are wretched and those who are felicitous, while *As for the wretched* ... refers to the people of Hell, and *As for the felicitous* ... refers to the inhabitants of Paradise, while the exception in both instances refers to the sinful monotheists, who God will take out of the Fire and admit to Paradise. In this way, most of the problems that arose against the previous standpoint are resolved.

The seventh explanation is that invoking the contingency of this on the Divine Will is actually to emphasize that the inhabitants of Hell and Paradise will dwell in each eternally and make the prospect of them ever exiting these seem distant, because God does not will anything other than their perpetuity and eternity, which He has ordained. It is as if this is contingent on what will not be, because He does not will to take them out of either.

This reading shares in common with the first one the claim that the exception in both instances is not intended to negate the eternal duration of

Paradise and Hell. However, the first reading makes the specific claim that the exception is to safeguard God's omnipotence, while this explanation makes the specific claim that the exception is to demonstrate that eternity cannot be disrupted by any means, unless God wills to disrupt it, and He will not will that in the first place.

The eighth explanation is that what is intended here is the exception of the time when a group from the inhabitants of Hell entered before another group, and the same in the case of groups who enter Heaven. God Almighty says elsewhere, *The faithless will be driven to hell in throngs ... Those who are wary of their Lord will be led to paradise in throngs* (39:71). Thus, one group of them among them enters after another, and there must be a delay between the two of them. According to this explanation, it is this that God is excluding when He says, *except what your Lord may wish*. This explanation has been transmitted from Salām b. al-Mustanīr al-Basrī.

However, the problem with this explanation is that the phrase, *They shall remain in it for as long as the heavens and the earth endure*, in both the case of Hell and of Paradise, is that this description appears to concern the length of their stay in each from the aspect of its ending point rather than its starting point.

In any case, the beginning of the duration of their imprisonment in Hell or inhabitation of Paradise is the Day of Judgement, and this is not affected because one group enters Paradise or Hell after another group or before it and the time difference that results from that.

The ninth explanation is that what is meant is that they will dwell in Hell, being tormented therein for the duration of their existence in the graves as long as the heavens and the earth last in this world. When they perish and cease to exist, their punishment will be interrupted until God resurrects them for the Final Judgement. God's saying, *except what your Lord may wish*, is an exception that applies to what will happen in the Hereafter. This interpretation has been reported in *Majmaʿ al-bayān* from Shaykh Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī in his own *Tafsīr*, quoting from a number of Shīʿī scholars in their own commentaries.

However, the issue with this explanation is the same as that of the second one, which is based on taking the particle *illā* to mean 'aside from', and the reader will already be familiar with the problems inherent in this.

The tenth explanation is that what is meant by *except what your Lord*

*may wish* is 'whoever your Lord wishes to forgive and hence will not let them enter Hell.' Therefore, the exception is from the pronoun that refers back to *As for the wretched*. The apparent meaning of the exception God directs towards the inhabitants of Paradise in the passage, *As for the felicitous, ... except what your Lord may wish*, refers to the monotheists who come out of Hell and are admitted to Paradise, as has already been mentioned in some of the previous points. The meaning is that the felicitous ones are in Heaven, dwelling therein eternally, except for the transgressors from the monotheists who are in Hell and then they are brought of there and lodged in Paradise. This explanation has been attributed to Abū Majāz.

However, what has been stated applies only to the first exception; the second exception must necessarily be directed in a different way, which in any case would necessarily disrupt the unity of the context that exists between the two verses.

Consider that sinners among the faithful, whom God forgives and thereby does not send to Hell, are not pardoned unconditionally, but rather are forgiven due to good deeds they performed or the intercession of others on their behalf. Thus, they become blessed and are included in the second verse: *As for the felicitous, they will be in paradise ...*, without first being included among the wretched and then being exempted from entering hell. In short, they are not wretched to be exempted; rather, they are felicitous and will enter paradise from the beginning.

*... indeed your Lord does what He desires*—serves as a rationale for the exception while simultaneously affirming God's omnipotence through its unrestricted meaning, as previously mentioned.

وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ سُعِدُوا فَفِي الْجَنَّةِ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا مَا دَامَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ
إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ رَبُّكَ ۖ عَطَاءً غَيْرَ مَجْذُوذٍ ﴿١٠٨﴾

(11:108) As for the felicitous, they will be in paradise. They will remain in it for as long as the heavens and the earth endure—except what your Lord may wish—an endless bounty (*'aṭā'an ghayr majdhūdh*).

This can be read in one of two ways: the passive voice ('those who are made felicitous') and in the active voice ('those who are felicitous'). The latter seems more linguistically appropriate because the verb *sa'āda* is

intransitive in everyday usage. However, reading *the felicitous* in the passive voice, while reading *the wretched* in the previous verse in the active voice, subtly implies that happiness and goodness come from God, while the evil that afflicts them is self-imposed, as stated in *Sūrah al-Nūr* (24:21): *Were it not for Allah's grace and His mercy upon you, not one of you would ever be pure.*

The adjective *majdhūdh* is derived from *jadhdh*, meaning 'to cut off.' Therefore, describing God's gift as *ghayr majdhūdh* means that it is never cut off and never ends. In other words, Paradise is a never-ending divine gift, in spite of the previous exception of *except what your Lord may wish*. This is one of the most beautiful indications that the purpose behind this exception is to affirm God's absolute omnipotence and sovereignty and show that the reins of power are never out of his His hands.

Everything that was discussed in relation to the preceding verse applies to the present verse, except for the explanations based on the assumption that the exception in His statement, *except what your Lord may wish*, refers to those who first entered Hell and then moved to Paradise. That is because it is possible for some who enters Hell to later exit it, but no one who enters Paradise, which is the eternal Paradise, will ever exit it as a form of otherworldy punishment. This is an essential principle that is established in the Qur'an and traditions. There is such an abundance of verses and narrations in this regard that no one can possibly deny their implication, even if the Qur'an's statements about some people leaving hell are not as clear.

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Tabrisī says about the necessity of the virtuous entering Paradise and the impossibility of them ever leaving it: 'It is a consensus of the Muslim community that whoever deserves divine reward must enter Paradise and that He will never leave it after He has entered it.'

The idea that those people worthy of divine reward must necessarily enter Paradise is based on the universally accepted rational principle that fulfilling a promise is obligatory, unlike fulfilling a threat. This is because the one to whom promise is made is conferred a right to what is promise, and not fulfilling this promise equates to neglecting another's right, which is an act of injustice. As for the threat, it is making a right for the issuer to act against the person to whom the threat is made. It is not obligatory for the holder of the right to claim his right, but he may choose to do so or to forgo it. God, the Glorious, has promised His obedient servants Paradise as

a reward for their obedience, and He has threatened the disobedient with Hell for their disobedience. Therefore, it is obligatory that the obedient enter Paradise in fulfilment of the right that He has made incumbent for them upon Himself. As for the punishment of the disobedient, it is a right He has made for Himself against them, so He has the choice to punish them, thus fulfilling His right, or to leave them, forgoing His right.

As for the issue of not exiting Paradise once entered, this is supported by numerous verses and narrations. The consensus mentioned is based on what is accepted from the implications of the scripture and tradition, or reason, and is not a separate argument.

## Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cites al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī, Ibn Māja, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Abū al-Shaykkh, Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Asmā' wa al-ṣifāt*, all of whom report from Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī that the Messenger of God said: 'Indeed, God allows the wrongdoer respite, but when He seizes him, He does not let him escape.' Then he recited: *Such is the seizing of your Lord when He seizes the townships that are wrongdoing. Indeed His seizing is painful, severe* (11:102).'

(2) In the same source, he cites al-Tirmidhī—who declares the tradition good (*ḥasan*)—and Abū Yaʿlā, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī al-Ḥātim, Abū al-Shaykh, and Ibn Mardawayh, all of whom narrate from 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb: 'When the verse was revealed, *Some of them will be wretched and some felicitous*, I said: "O Messenger of God, then why should we do anything? For something already predetermined or for something yet to be decided?" The Prophet replied, "For something already settled, 'Umar. The pens have been lifted, and the scrolls have dried up, yet everyone will find it easy to do that for which they were created."'

**Author's comment:** This wording is narrated from the Prophet through multiple channels in Sunnī sources, as in Sahih Al-Bukhari from 'Imrān b. al-Ḥuṣayn, who said: 'I asked: "O Messenger of God, what do people labour for?" He said: "Everyone will find it easy to do that for which he was created."'

(3) In the same source, it is also reported from ʿAlī , from the Prophet that he was at a funeral and took a stick and began to poke the ground. He said: 'There is none among you who has not had his seat assigned either in Paradise or in Hellfire.' They asked: 'Shall we not then rely upon this and cease working?' He replied: 'No, carry on doing good deeds, for everyone will find it easy to do that for which he was created.' He then recited the verse: *As for him who gives and is Godwary* (92:5).

**Author's comment:** To clarify this, we say: It is obvious to anyone with a grain of sense that all events occurring in this world, both in their existence and their effects, are potential until they are garbed of certainty and existence. This potential means that existence and non-existence are equal in relation to them. For example, a piece of wood has the potential to become ash through burning, and a semen has the potential to become a human if it effectively becomes part of the necessary causes for a human being, and also the potential to remain as non-human if these necessary causes cease to exist.

Once something has put on the garb of existence, such as when wood has actually become ash or semen has actually become a human, the potentiality that was attributed to it ceases, as it no longer holds the potential to become both ash and not-ash, or human and non-human. It simply becomes a human and nothing else, or ash and nothing else, other possibilities are negated with this actuality.

In this context, it becomes clear that when we take actualized events and attribute them to their underlying causes and, by the same token, attribute these causes to the causes of causes, the world in this perspective appears as a chain of actualized events with nothing changing from its original state of potentiality to a state of actuality. The possibilities, preparations, and alternatives all cease to exist. Conversely, when we look at things from the aspect of potentialities and possibilities that they hold latent within themselves with respect to their final forms, no physical entities escape the realm of possibility and the domain of choice.

Thus, the universe has two aspects: one of necessity and actuality, where every part of it—whether a substance or the effect of a substance—is determined and admits no ambiguity or hesitation, no changes or alterations. This is the aspect where effects rely on their originating and sufficient

causes, which are inseparable from their corollaries, and whose effects always result from them, and no trick can change them from what they are, nor any effort or motion can alter them.

The other aspect is the realm of possibility, the form of preparedness and susceptibility, where nothing is determined except after occurrence, and nothing moves from ambiguity and generality until it becomes a reality. On this plane, the laws of choice exist, and with it arises efforts and movements, work and acquisition take place, and it is to this that education, upbringing, fear, hope, aspirations, and desires have their influence, and where the call to action, and moral commands and prohibitions are effective, and reward and punishment become valid.

It is self-evident that these two aspects do not conflict in reality, and that one of them does not invalidate the other. Actualized phenomena have their context, and possibility and potentiality have theirs, just as the ontological ambiguity of a particular event does not prevent its realization after it has occurred, and its subsequent realization does not render its prior ambiguity void.

The first aspect—that of ambiguity—corresponds to Divine Decree, and the actuality of events according to it does not invalidate their indeterminacy in the context of invitation, work, and acquisition. We will conclude the discussion on this when we address the topics of Divine Decree and Destiny at the appropriate place, God willing.

Now, let's return to our discussion of the traditions:

Reflecting on their context, it appears that what the listeners understood from the Prophet's statement about felicity and wretchedness, paradise and hell, and the writing of the pen to that effect, that these were predestined and unavoidable fates. Based on this, they arrived at the misconception, first, that the ways that led people to one fate or the other were irrelevant, and that the laws of causality no longer applied, such that, if a person is destined for heaven, this will inevitably happen, regardless of whether they do good deeds or whether they commit sins.

Secondly, they believed that these ways and means are analogous to the ends and effects that fall under the Divine Decree, which is written and determined, rendering human free will meaningless and leaving no room for effort and moral responsibility.

Consider the questions posed in these traditions:

'O Messenger of God, then why should we do anything? For something already predetermined or for something yet to be decided?'

'O Messenger of God, what do people labour for?'

'Shall we not then rely upon this and cease working?'

What the questioners are in fact asking is: 'Should we not stop doing deeds and rely instead upon what God has written for us in His Book that can neither be changed nor altered?' All of this points to their first misconception, and it is as though their own experience of free will and the ability to act prevented them from recognizing the second one. However, these two misconceptions are intrinsically linked, and even though the second may have been deeply rooted in their hearts, they did not express it.

In response to their questions, the Prophet said: 'everyone will find it easy to do that for which he was created.' This is an allusion to God's description of the creation of the human being: *Then He made the way easy for him* (80:20). This means that those created for Heaven and those created for Hell, as stated in the verse, *Certainly We have created for hell many of the jinn and humans* (7:179), each have a purpose in their creation. God has made the path to these ends easy for them and facilitated their journey to their ultimate destination.

Between a person destined for Paradise and Paradise itself, there lies a path that they must inevitably follow in order to reach it. Similarly, between a person destined for Hell and Hell itself, there lies a path. The path to Heaven is faith and piety, while the path to Hell is idolatry and sin. The person for whom Heaven has been decreed must tread the path of faith and piety. He cannot simply be granted Heaven regardless of whether he acts righteously or not, or whether his actions are good or bad. The same applies to the person for whom Hell has been decreed: his path is that of idolatry and sin, not merely an unconditional decree.

For this reason, the Prophet followed his statement, 'everyone will find it easy to do that for which he was created', by reciting God's words, *As for him who gives and is Godwary and confirms the best promise, We shall surely ease him into facility. But as for him who is stingy and self-complacent, and denies the best promise, We shall surely ease him into hardship* (92:10).

Expecting one of these two outcomes without following its respective path is like hoping to be filled without eating, or to quench one's thirst without drinking, or to move from one place to another without actually

moving. In this life, which is a realm of striving and activity, one can only achieve their goals by undertaking a journey. As God says, *and that nothing belongs to man except what he strives for, and that he will soon be shown his endeavour, then he will be rewarded for it with the fullest reward* (53:41).

However, even though his audience might not have explicitly voiced it, the Prophet did not fail to address the second misconception, which are expressed in the idea of 'making easy.' To make something easy (*taysīr*) means to facilitate it, and it is well known that such facilitation can only occur in matters that are not already inevitable or foreordained. If the path to Heaven were absolutely and inevitably predestined for those for whom it has been written, it would be fixed and unchangeable. There would be no meaning in facilitating or easing their journey, as should be obvious.

Therefore, the Prophet's saying, 'everyone will find it easy to do that for which he was created', implies that the matters which human beings incline towards, such as felicity or wretchedness, have two aspects. The first aspect is the inevitability and predetermination that cannot change its course, and the second aspect is the possibility and choice that is made easy for humans to follow through deeds and moral responsibility. The divine call to humankind is only directed to the second aspect, not the first.[1]

We have previously discussed predestination and free will in our commentary on the verse, *and He leads no one astray thereby except the transgressors* (2:26) in the first volume of this commentary.

(4) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cites Ibn Jarīr, Abū al-Shaykh, and Ibn Mardawayh, who narrate that Qatāda recited the verse, *As for the wretched ...* (11:106), then said: 'Anas narrated that Messenger of God said: "A group of people will come out of the Fire." and we do not say as the People of Harūrā' say.'

**Author's comment:** The statement, '... we do not say as the People of Harūrā' say', is the comment of Qatāda, not the Prophet . The People of Harūrā' are a sub-sect of the Khawārij, who asserted that whoever enters

1 In essence, this discussion clarifies that in Islam, while certain aspects of life are predetermined, human beings are endowed with the ability to choose their path. Their actions, good or bad, play a crucial role in determining their final destiny. This balance between divine decree and human agency forms a core principle in Islamic theology, emphasizing the importance of personal responsibility in the journey of life. (Ed.)

Hell will remain there forever without the possibility reprieve.

(5) Ibn Mardawayh narrated from Jābir that the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, recited, "So those who were unfortunate - to His saying - except as your Lord wills," the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said: "If God wills to take people out of the Fire - from those who were unfortunate - and admit them into Paradise, He will do so." (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

(6) In *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, it is narrated from al-Ḥusayn b. Saʿīd al-Ahwāzī's *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, via chain of narrators from Muḥammad b. Muslim: 'I asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh about the Hellish (*jahanummiyyīn*). He said: "Abū Jaʿfar used to say: 'They will come out of it and arrive at a spring at the gates of Paradise that is called "the Spring of Life" (*ʿAyn al-Ḥaywān*). Its waters will sprinkle on them and they will flourish, just as plants flourish, their skin and hair will flourish.'"'

**Author's comment:** It is also reported via a chain of narration from ʿUmar b. Abān from him . The meaning of *jahannumiyyīn* are a specific group of the inmates of Hell who are believers in monotheism (*ahl al-tawḥīd*) who will be saved from Hell through intercession (*shafāʿa*). They are the ones called *jahannumiyyīn*, not everyone who dwells in Hell, as will become clear from the other traditions below.

(7) It is narrated from Abū Baṣīr, who said: 'I heard Abū Jaʿfar say: "Indeed, there are people who will leave Hell behind. When they have become ashes, intercession will reach them." He said, "They will be taken to a river that flows out of the land of the inhabitants of Paradise. They will bathe there, and their flesh and blood will recover. The scorching effects of Hell will disappear from them. They will enter paradise and the inhabitants of Paradise will call them 'the Hellish' (*jahannumiyyīn*). They will unanimously call out, 'O God, remove this name from us!'" He said, "And it will be removed from them." Then he said, "O Abū Baṣīr, indeed the enemies of ʿAlī are the ones who will dwell in Hell forever, and intercession will not reach them."' (*Tafsīr al-Burhān*)

(8) It is narrated on the authority of ʿUmar b. Abān who said, 'I heard a righteous servant say about the hellish: '"Indeed, they

enter Hell because of their sins, and they will exit due to God's pardon."' (ibid.)

(9) It is narrated on the authority of Ḥumrān who said, 'I said to Abū 'Abd Allāh : 'They say, "Do not be amazed by a people who claim that God will bring some people out of Hell to make them dwellers of paradise along with God's allies." He replied, "Do they not read God's statement, *Beside these two, there will be two other gardens* (55:62)? That is a garden beyond a garden, and a hell beyond a hell. They will not dwell with God's allies." He then said, "Between them, I swear by God, there is a station, but I cannot discuss it. Their condition is more narrow than a ring. When the Riser (*Qā'im*) rises, he will start with these."'

**Author's comment:** When he says, 'When the Riser rises...', he means that, when he appears, he will first exact retribution upon those who mocked the people of truth.

(10) In *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī*, it is narrated from Ḥumrān, from Abū Ja'far : 'I asked him about the verse, *They shall remain in it for as long as the heavens and the earth endure—except what your Lord may wish* (11:107). He said, "This is about the ones who leave Hell behind."'

(11) It is narrated from Abū Baṣīr, from Imām al-Bāqir , concerning the verse, *Some of them will be wretched and some felicitous* (11:105): 'In the description of the people of Hell, an exception was made, but there was no exception in the mention of the description of the people of Paradise: *They will remain in it for as long as the heavens and the earth endure—except what your Lord may wish—an endless bounty* (11:108).' (ibid.)

**Author's comment:** Here, he points out that the exception of divine will in the case of the people of Paradise, which God followed with the statement, '*an endless bounty*', is not an exception indicating the expulsion of some of the inhabitants of paradise from it, rather it is there to preserve God's absolute power, unlike the exception in the case of the people of Hell, which is followed by His statement, *indeed your Lord does what He desires* (11:107), suggesting that this had actually taken place, as we have already discussed previously.

(12) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī narrates from Abū al-Shaykh, who narrates from al-Sudayy, about the verse, *As for the wretched*

... (11:107): 'Later, by the will of God, the verse was abrogated, and God revealed in Medina: *Indeed those who are faithless and do wrong, Allah shall never forgive them, nor shall He guide them to any way* ... (4:168). Thus, any hope of release for the inhabitants of Hell was removed, meaning that they were condemned to remain there eternally.' Regarding the verse, *As for the felicitous* ..., he said: 'Later, by the will of God, the verse was abrogated, and God revealed in Medina: *As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds, We shall admit them into gardens with streams running in them, to remain in them forever* ... (4:58), meaning that they would dwell there eternally.

**Author's comment:** What this tradition says about the abrogation of these two verses implies that they indicate that they meant people would reside in Paradise and Hell only temporarily, which contradicts what we know to be the case. In such contexts, abrogation does not correspond with reason or with revelation. It also does not agree with the explicit meaning of verses concerning Paradise. Furthermore, the idea that both groups will remain in Paradise and Hell eternally is established in many Meccan chapters, including *al-Anʿām* and *al-Aʿrāf*. Therefore, there is no sense in saying that this was only revealed later, in Medina.

(13) Ibn al-Mundhir reports from al-Ḥasan, who reports from ʿUmar: 'If the inhabitants of Hell remained in it for as long as there are grains of sand, there would come a day when they would leave it.' (*al-Durr al-manthūr*)

(14) Isḥāq b. Rāhawayh narrates from Abū Hurayra: 'A day will come upon Hell when no one will remain in it.' Then he recited the verse, *As for the wretched* ... (11:107). (ibid.)

(15) Ibn al-Mundhir and Abū al-Shaykh narrate from Ibrāhīm, who said: 'There is no verse in the Qur'an more hopeful for the inmates of Hell than this one: *They shall remain in it for as long as the heavens and the earth endure—except what your Lord may wish* (11:107). Ibn Masʿūd once said: 'There will come a time when its gates will be thrown open.' (ibid.)

**Author's comment:** The three above mentioned narrations are all opinions of the Companions and, as such, do not constitute a conclusive proof (*ḥujja*) for anyone other than themselves. If they are assumed to have

interrupted chains of narration, they would be dismissed due to the fact that they contradict the Qur'an. God has said of the disbelievers: *and they shall not leave the Fire* (2:167).

(16) In *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, it is transmitted from al-Ḥusayn b. Saʿīd's *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, via a chain of narrators going back to Ḥumrān: 'I said to Abū ʿAbd Allāh : "It has reached us that there will come a time when the gates of Hell will be thrown open!" He said: "No by God, it is for eternity." I quoted the verse, *They shall remain in it for as long as the heavens and the earth endure—except what your Lord may wish*. He said: 'This is about those who will be released Hell.

**Author's comment:** The narrations indicating that the disbelievers will be consigned to Hell eternally, according to the narration of the Imams of the Prophet's Household , are extremely numerous. We have previously presented a philosophical discussion on the perpetuity of punishment and its cessation in our commentary on the verse, *and they shall not leave the Fire* (2:167).

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## Verses 109–119

In the previous sections of verses, God recounted the stories of past nations to the Prophet and explained how their idolatry, transgression, denial of God's signs, and arrogance towards the truth to which their prophets summoned them led them to face destruction and eradication and then to the eternal Fire on a day when people will be gathered together. He summarized their situation in the preceding verses.

In the present section of verses, God commands His Prophet and those with him, to draw lessons from this. If they do this, they will be certain that associating others with God and causing corruption on earth only leads humankind to ruin and disaster. Hence, they should adhere to the path of servanthood, hold fast to patience and prayer, and not incline towards those who have done wrong, lest they also be touched by the Fire. They have no protectors apart from God and will not be helped by anyone else. They should know that the word of God is supreme, while the word of those who disbelieve is abased. Even if they are granted respite in what God allows them, it is only to fulfil the word of truth that has been foreordained, and it will be fulfilled as they are judged on the Day of Resurrection.

فَلَا تَكُ فِي مِرْيَةٍ مِمَّا يَعْبُدُ هَٰؤُلَاءِ ۚ مَا يَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا كَمَا يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُهُمْ
مِنْ قَبْلُ ۚ وَإِنَّا لَمُوَفُّوهُمْ نَصِيبَهُمْ غَيْرَ مَنْقُوصٍ ﴿١٠٩﴾

(11:109) So do not be in doubt about what these worship: they worship just as their fathers worshipped before, and We shall surely pay them their full share, undiminished.

This is presented as a conclusion drawn from what has been discussed in the detailed stories of past nations who wronged themselves by associating partners with God and causing corruption on earth before God seized them with divine punishment. The reference to 'these' refers to the people of the Prophet , particularly his saying, ... *they worship just as their fathers worshipped before ...,* which means that they worship their idols out of imitation, just like their fathers. Therefore, the later generations follow

the path of the first without any valid proof. The reference to their 'share' means their share in respect to their polytheism and transgressions.

"... undiminished" (*ghayr manqūṣ*) is an adverbial qualifier of *their full share*. It serves to emphasize the meaning of the phrase, 'We shall surely pay them' (*innā la-muwaffū-hum*), as the verb *tawfiya* (from whence the active participle *muwaffūn* is derived) means 'to pay someone in full.' This also hints at the fact that the disbelievers have no hope of God's pardon.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'Hear the stories of the ancients: That they worshipped deities besides God and denied His signs and learn how God dealt with them by destroying them in this world and consigning them to eternal Fire in the Hereafter. When you have become aware of all of this, you will not be in any doubt about the fact that those who worship idols among your own people do so only the same way as their forefathers, out of blind imitation, without any proof or evidence. We will certainly give them the full recompense for their deeds, without diminishing it in the least on account of intercession or forgiveness, no matter what.'

The reference to their 'fathers' could mean the destroyed nations of the past, rather than their Arab ancestors descended from Ishmael, for example. God refers to those ancient nations as their 'fathers' or 'predecessors', as in His saying, *Have they not contemplated the discourse, or has anything come to them that did not come to their forefathers?* (23:68). This explanation seems more appropriate to the context of the verse. So, the meaning, according to this reading, is: 'Do not be in doubt about the worship of your people. They worship only as those doomed nations, who are their spiritual forefathers, worshipped. And We will surely give them their fair share of recompense, just as we did with these forefathers of theirs.'

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ فَاخْتُلِفَ فِيهِ ۚ وَلَوْلَا كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ مِنْ رَبِّكَ لَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ ۚ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِنْهُ مُرِيبٍ ﴿١١٠﴾

(11:110) Certainly We gave Moses the Book, but differences arose about it, and were it not for a prior decree of your Lord, a decision would have been made between them; indeed they are in grave doubt concerning it.

These verses are intended to call to mind the stories already mentioned in this chapter, and the stories themselves are narrated for people to learn

from them and make a fair judgement about the idolaters association of partners with God, their denial of God's signs, and their claim that the Qur'an is a fabrication against God.

These verses discuss the matter of their worship of deities and their denial of the Qur'an. God mentions that the people's worship of the deities besides God is just like the worship of their ancestors from the past nations, and they will receive punishment just like their ancestors did. Their disagreement about the Book of God is like the disagreement of Moses' nation about what God gave them from the Book, and that God will judge between them in what they disagreed about. Therefore, His saying, *Certainly We gave Moses the Book, but differences arose about it …*, is a reference to the Israelites disagreement about the Torah after Moses.

The phrase, *and were it not for a prior decree of your Lord, a decision would have been made between them*, affirms a recurring theme throughout the Qur'an: Human disagreement about worldly matters is natural, yet their disagreement about matters of faith after knowledge has come has no basis except in selfish desires. This is affirmed in the following verses: *Mankind were but a single community; then they differed …* (10:19); *… and those who were given the Book did not differ except after knowledge had come to them, out of envy among themselves* (3:19); *Mankind were a single community; then Allah sent the prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He sent down with them the Book with the truth, that it may judge between the people concerning that about which they differed, and none differed in it except those who had been given it, after the manifest proofs had come to them, out of envy among themselves* (2:213).

God has decreed that He will compensate people for their actions and recompense them for what moral worth they have earned in this worldly life. This decree necessitates that He judge among them in their disagreements. However, He has also decreed that they will enjoy life on earth until the Day of Judgement, building the world and acquiring deeds for their hereafter, as stated: *On the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for a time* (2:36). These decrees imply that God's judgement between those who dispute God's religion and His Book out of selfishness will be postponed until the Day of Resurrection.

**Poser:** 'Why did God destroy previous nations for their injustice? Could He not have postponed their destruction until the Day of Resurrection in

accordance with His decree?'

**Reply:** Their destruction was not simply due to their disbelief, disobedience, or mere disagreement about religious matters, which is addressed by the other decree and whose judgement is postponed it until the Day of Resurrection. Instead, a third decree is indicated by the verse: *There is an messenger for every nation; so when their messenger comes, judgement is made between them with justice, and they are not wronged* (10:47).

Therefore, the phrase in the present verse, ... *and were it not for a prior decree of your Lord, a decision would have been made between them*, indicates that people's disagreement about the Book is a point of intersection between two divine decrees. One decree necessitates that God judge among people in their disagreements, while the other mandates that God should grant them respite until the Day of Judgement and not requite them for their actions straight away. The implication of all this is that their punishment is postponed until the Day of Judgement.

As for the phrase, *indeed they are in grave doubt* (shakk murīb) *concerning it*: the adjective *murīb* is derived from *irāba*, which means for doubt to be cast into one's heart. Therefore, describing their doubt as *murīb* is akin to expressions such as 'a shading shadow' (*ẓill ẓalīl*), 'a covered veil' (*ḥijāb mastūr*), or 'an ossified stone' (*ḥijr maḥjūr*), whereby the adjective re-emphasizes the meaning of the noun in qualifies—in this case, the meaning of doubt.

It appears that the pronoun 'they' in the phrase, *indeed they*, refers to the followers of Moses, who are the Israelites. And they have a right to harbour doubts, since the existing Torah's chain of transmission ends with a man from their priesthood named Ezra, who wrote it for them when they returned from Babylon to the Holy Land after their period of captivity. The Torah had been burned years before, when the Temple in Jerusalem was burnt, so having its chain of transmission end with one individual naturally breeds suspicion about it. Something similar can be said about the Gospel in terms of its chain of transmission.

Moreover, the current Torah contains things that human nature would not accept as being attributed to a divine book, which naturally causes one to doubt it.

As for reading the pronoun in the phrase, *indeed they*, as a reference to the Arab polytheists and the word *it* in *concerning it* to the Qur'an, as some

exegetes have done, seems unlikely. For God has already established His argument against them at the beginning of the chapter that it is His book revealed from Him to His Prophet , and challenged them to produce the like of it: *Do they say, 'He has fabricated it?' Say, 'Then bring ten chapters like it, fabricated, and invoke whomever you can, besides Allah, should you be truthful'* (11:13). Therefore, it is meaningless to attribute doubt to them in this context.

وَإِنَّ كُلًّا لَمَّا لَيُوَفِّيَنَّهُمْ رَبُّكَ أَعْمَالَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّهُ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١١١﴾

(11:111) Your Lord will indeed recompense everyone fully for their works (*wa inna kullan lammā la-yuwaffiyanna-hum rabbu-ka aʿmālahum*). Indeed He is well aware of what they do.

Grammatically, the noun of *inna* ('indeed') in this sentence is *kullan* ('everyone'), its predicate is *la-yuwaffiyanna-hum* ('will recompense fully'), where the the *lām* and *nūn* (*la-yuwaffi<u>anna</u>-hum*) are for emphasis. Meanwhile *lammā* is composed of a *lām* to signify an oath (*qasm*) and a *mā*, which functions as a separator between the two *lāms* (*<u>lam</u>mā <u>la</u>-yuwaffiyanna-hum*) while also providing further emphasis. The object of this oath is left implicit, but indicated by the predicate of *inna*.

Therefore, the meaning is: 'Indeed, all of these differing persons, your Lord swears that He will give them, that is, recompense them in full, for their deeds. He is well aware of what they do, whether good or bad.'

In the commentary *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, al-Ālūsī relates from Abū Ḥayyān from Ibn al-Ḥājib that *lammā* in this verse is the jussive *lammā* (*al-jāzima*, meaning 'not yet') and that it is common to leave its object implicit in usage. One might say: *Kharajtu wa lammā* or *sāfartu wa lammā*. Then he writes: 'The most appropriate reading of this object in this context is *lammā yuwaffū-hā* ("they have not yet been paid"), meaning: "Your Lord will indeed recompense everyone fully for their works who has not yet been recompensed."' And this is explanation has merit.

For scholars of exegesis, there are extensive literary discussions about the vocabulary and structure of this verse. We have not expanded beyond what is necessary for our purposes. For those who wish to delve deeper, they are advised to consult the comprehensive commentaries on the Qur'an.

فَاسْتَقِمْ كَمَا أُمِرْتَ وَمَنْ تَابَ مَعَكَ وَلَا تَطْغَوْا ۚ إِنَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١١٢﴾

(11:112) So go aright (*fa-istaqim*), just as you have been commanded—and whoever has turned with you—and do not overstep the bounds. Indeed He sees best what you do.

According to al-Rāghib and others, the verbs *qāma* ('stand', the root from whence is derived the Form X imperative verb *istaqim*), *thabata* ('be firm') and *rakaza* ('to fix') all share the same meaning. It appears that the original sense of this word is derived from the 'standing' (*qiyām*) of a human being. That is to say, in all states and positions of human beings other than standing—like sitting, lying, kneeling, reclining, or bending—they are not able to perform all the tasks they intend to do, such as seizing, reaching out, taking, or returning. This is in contrast to when a person stands upright on their feet, they are in their most balanced state, which allows them to perform the widest range of tasks, whether it is to plant their feet, move, take, return, give, withhold, pull, or push. They remain stable and in control over the power and actions at their disposal. Thus, when a human being stands, this embodies their human character with all of its attendant affairs.

From this, the term 'standing' was extended metaphorically to other entities in their most balanced state (i.e. 'upright'), where they have control over their effects and functions. For instance, the standing of a column means it remains upright, a tree stands by anchoring its trunk deep into the earth, a container filled with liquid stands when it rests on its base without spilling its contents, and a ruler stands when he or she spreads justice on earth, just like a law or tradition stands when it is implemented across the lands.

The verb *iqāma* is the transitive Form IV conjugation of *qāma*, it literally means 'to make something stand' and, in everyday speech, it means 'to establish something.' In other words, it means to put something in a state where it has all of its effects without losing any of them, such as establishing justice, establishing the tradition (*sunna*), establishing prayer, establishing testimony, establishing the bounds (*ḥudūd*), and establishing religion, among other things.

As for *istiqāma*, this is the Form X conjugation of the verb *qāma*, and it means to pursue the 'uprightness' of something and to seek the manifestation of all of its effects and benefits. Therefore, *istiqāmat al-ṭarīq* ('the path going aright') denotes all the qualities that are sought from the

path, such as straightness, clarity, and its not leading the traveller astray. Meanwhile, *istiqāmat al-insān* ('the human being going aright') means that they seek to reform and make upright their own self, in such a way that no corruption or deficiency affects it, and it comes to complete fruition: *Say, 'I am just a human being like you. It has been revealed to me that your God is the One God. So go aright with regard Him ...'* (41:6)—meaning: 'Observe the right of His oneness.' Elsewhere, God says: *Indeed those who say, 'Our Lord is Allah!' and then go right...'* (41:30)—this means they stayed steadfast in all matters of their lives based on what they professed. They do not swerve in their beliefs, morals, and actions except towards what is in line with monotheism and what is compatible with it. In other words, they respect and preserve it in all that they face internally and externally. *So set your countenance on the religion as a people of pure faith ...* (30:30), the meaning of 'to set one's countenance' is to turn the self towards performing an action and orient it towards it. The act of a person setting themselves in a matter is their *istiqāma* ('going aright') in it. Understanding this concept is crucial.

The phrase, *So go aright, just as you have been commanded ...*, means: 'Be steadfast in your religion and observe its dues fully, in accordance with God's command that you go aright.' He has commanded the faithful to go aright in the verses: *... and that: "Dedicate yourself to the religion, as a hanif, and never be one of the polytheists'* (10:105); *So set your countenance on the religion as a people of pure faith, the origination of Allah according to which He originated mankind There is no altering Allah's creation; that is the upright religion, but most people do not know* (30:30).

In *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, al-Ālūsī writes: 'God commanded his Messenger go aright just as He had ordered him to previously. This implies that the Messenger was directed by another revelation, even if it was not recited, as several sources suggest. This is apparent evidence that God commanded continuous steadfastness, which involves strictly adhering to the right path, the middle way between excess and negligence. This term encompasses everything related to knowledge, action, and all ethical matters.'

In other words, al-Ālūsī believes there is a possibility that there was another non-recited revelation, as indicated by the phrase, *just as you have been commanded* (meaning to go aright as you have previously ordered). This explanation, however, is unlikely, considering the Qur'anic approach,

and it is improbable to rely on an unknown or undisclosed principle in order to explain the Qur'an.

In addition, the reader is already aware that *just as you have been commanded* refers to what God has ordered elsewhere in His revelation: to set one's countenance upon the religion in an upright manner. The act of setting one's countenance upon the religion is equivalent to going aright in the faith. As the reader will have noted, this phrase, *So set your countenance on the religion …*, appears in two Meccan surahs, and Sūrah Yūnus, which was one of them, was revealed before this chapter, without any doubt, even though it is not certain when the other chapter, which is Sūrah al-Rūm, was revealed in relation to this one.

As for his claim that, *go aright* means 'strictly adhering to the right path, the middle way between excess and negligence', you are already aware that the meaning of a person *going aright* in some matter is about steadfastness in preserving it and fulfilling his responsibilities towards it perfectly and completely. The steadfastness (*istiqāma*) of a person in this sense is focused on fulfilling all of their duties with all of their faculties and abilities, such that they do not leave any of their energy for trivial matters that are of no importance.

If the command to be steadfast meant to adhere to moderation between excess and negligence, it would have been more appropriate to pair this command with prohibition against both excess and negligence. However, God only prohibited against excess by saying, *and do not overstep the bounds*, which is equivalent to an explanatory clause for the phrase, *So go aright, just as you have been commanded—and whoever has turned with you …* This is the best piece of evidence that the phrase, *So go aright* and similar commands to it mean to be firm in one's divine servanthood and to strictly observe the responsibilities associated with this. Then, the verse prohibits transgressing beyond this stage by disdaining submission to God and casting off the mantle of servanthood by saying, '*do not overstep the bounds*' in the same as past nations did. They were afflicted only on account of excess, not negligence, and arrogance, not humility.

The phrase, *and whoever has turned with you*, is joined to the implicit pronoun in to command to *go aright*, meaning: 'you should remain upright, and so should those who turned toward God with you.' In other words, 'All of you should remain upright.' The Prophet is only singled out

from the group and given a specific mention out of respect for the status of prophethood. This is a consistent feature of God's discourse, as seen in verses like *The Messenger has faith in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and all the faithful* (2:285), and *on the day when Allah will not let the Prophet down and the faithful who are with him* (66:8).

However, the command that qualifies the phrase '*go aright*'—that is, *just as you have been commanded*—appears to have been directed specifically to the Prophet and no one else shares in this. After all, the command expressed in phrases like *So set your countenance on the religion* ... is exclusive to him. And if God had said instead, 'All of you, go aright', it would not be correct to refer back to the previous command.

Those who '*turned with*' the Prophet are the believers who turned back to God through faith. The word *tawba* is used to describe faith here because faith means turning away from idolatry and back to God, and this usage occurs frequently in the Qur'an. For example, see the verse: ... *and they plead for forgiveness for the faithful: 'Our Lord! You comprehend all things in mercy and knowledge. So forgive those who repent and follow Your way* ... (40:7).

The phrase, *and do not overstep the bounds*, means not to transgress the limit set for you by your innate nature (*fiṭra*) and creation (*khilqa*), which is to serve God alone, as those before you overstepped and strayed into idolatry, leading them to ruin. The word 'overstep' (*ṭughyān*) that is used here literally means for water to overflow, as when a river or body of water breaks its banks. It is then metaphorically used for this moral issue, which is a person's transgression in his life, due to the similarity of the effects of the two scenarios, namely corruption and ruin.

The phrase, *indeed He sees best what you do* provides a rationale for everything that preceded it in the verse. Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'Be steadfast in the religion of monotheism, adhere to the path of divine servanthood without wavering, and let those who believe with you be likewise steadfast. Do not exceed the limit that has been set for you, because God sees what you do and, if you violate His command, He will take you to task. This verse conveys an unmistakable tone of severity. There is no hint of mercy or trace of gentleness in it. It follows verses that include the accounts of the previous nations being held accountable for their actions and God's needlessness toward them, a topic that would indeed fill souls

with terror and make hearts flutter.

However, the passage, *So go aright, just as you have been commanded* singles out the Prophet by mentioning him separately from the believers. As we have already discussed, this is out of respect and reverence for his prophetic status. However, this also indicates an intensified emphasis on his moral responsibility because, by identifying him separately, the weight and awe of the divine address is directed towards him alone, equal—in fact, to the weight and awe directed towards the entire community until the Day of Judgement. This is similar to the intensity found in another verse, *Had We not fortified you, certainly you might have inclined toward them a bit. Then We would have surely made you taste a double punishment in this life and a double punishment after death* (17:74).

Therefore, many exegetes note that when the Prophet said, '*Sūrah Hūd* has turned me grey', he was referring to this verse. We will discuss this further in our study of the relevant narrations, below.

وَلَا تَرْكَنُوا إِلَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا فَتَمَسَّكُمُ النَّارُ وَمَا لَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ
مِنْ أَوْلِيَاءَ ثُمَّ لَا تُنْصَرُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾

(11:113) And do not incline (*lā tarkanū*) toward the wrongdoers, lest the Fire should touch you, and you will not have any friend besides Allah, then you will not be helped.

According to the classical lexicon of Arabic *al-Siḥāḥ*, the verb *rakn* means to rely on someone or something, while *rukūn* means to incline towards and rest upon them or it. *Rukn* refers to the strongest side of a thing, or to something of great honor or dignity. Similarly, in *Lisān al-ʿArab*, we read that *rukūn* means to lean on something.

Al-Rāghib says:

> 'A thing's *rukn* is the side upon which it rests, and this came metaphorically to refer to strength or power, as per the verse: *If only I had some power through you, or could take refuge in a mighty support* (rukn shadīd). *Rakn* can also mean to lean or incline, as per the verse: *And do not incline* (lā tarkanū) *toward the wrongdoers* (11:113). A she-camel is called a *markana* when it has large veins in its udder that make its udder appear larger. *Marakun* refers to a small bowl. The *arkān al-ʿibādāt* are those parts of the acts of

worship upon which they are based and without which the acts of worship become null and void.'

This is similar to what has been mentioned in *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*.

Therefore, *rakn* means not merely to lean on something, but to lean on something because you have inclined towards it. This is why we see the verb *rakn* made transitive with the preposition *ilā* ('to ...') rather than *'alā'* ('upon ...'). The explanation given by linguists is the meaning of the word in its broadest form, as is often their tendency.

Based on this, to 'incline' towards the wrongdoers implies a kind of trust arising from an partiality towards them. Whether this inclination is in the realm of faith, as when one shares those parts of religious truths that are of benefit to them while concealing those that are not to avoid their dissemination, or in religious life, such as allowing wrongdoers to interfere in the administration of religious community as they please, granting them authority in public affairs, or even showing them affection which leads to association and influence that could adversely impact societal or individual life.

In short, approaching the matter of religion or religious life with a kind of inclination towards or support from the wrongdoers moves religion or religious life away from its independence and diverts it from its pure purpose by subjecting it to their influence. This leads to people pursuing the truth through the path of falsehood or reviving the truth by reviving falsehood, which ultimately results in the death of the truth in an effort to revive it.

The evidence for what we mentioned is that God Almighty in this verse, which is a continuation of the previous verse, links the Prophet and the believers from his community with the affairs that belong to him and his community, such as religious knowledge, morals, and Islamic traditions in terms of their propagation, preservation, and implementation, as well as fostering a social life that is in harmony with them, the governance of the Islamic community, and the individual's adherence to religion and taking refuge in the religious lifestyle. Neither the Prophet nor his community should rely on those who are wrongdoers in any of these aspects.

However, it is also evident that these two verses are like a conclusion drawn from the stories of the sinful towns that God seized with divine retribution on account of their wrongdoing. The wrongdoing of these

destroyed nations was not only in their association of partners with God and their worship of idols but also included following tyrants and spreading corruption in the earth after it had been reformed. They relied on the wrongful practices established by tyrannical rulers and followed by their people and, by doing so, they become wrongdoers themselves.

It is also evident from the context that the two verses are sequential in their purpose: The first forbids the believers from being amongst the wrongdoers, and the second prohibits them from approaching them, inclining towards them, and relying on their falsehoods in their pursuit of the truth. Therefore, His saying, *And do not incline toward the wrongdoers*, is a prohibition against inclining towards them, relying on them, and using their falsehoods as a foundation for the religion or of religious life.

Furthermore, the fact that these two verses serve as a conclusion derived from the aforementioned stories of past nations and prophets indicates that what God means by 'the wrongdoers' (*alladhīna ẓalamū*) in this verse is not just anyone who has been proven to have done wrong, or else it would include all people except the Infallibles, and then the prohibition would have relying on such persons would be meaningless. Nor does it mean those who are wrongdoers in the sense that they are characterized by this description and persist in their wrongdoing. This is because the use of the verbal construction *alladhīna ẓalamū* (lit. 'those who do wrong') would need some additional elements to indicate that this was something they were continuously doing or that was part of their character, and such elements are absent here.

Therefore, *the wrongdoers* here refers to those people whose state of wrongdoing is similar to that of those destroyed nations whose stories God has recounted in the previous verses of this chapter. According to these narratives, God addressed these peoples collectively following a divine call that was directed towards them, then He divided them into those who accepted it and those who rejected it. In several places of the aforementioned stories, those who accept are referred to as 'those who believed' (*alladhīna āmanū*), and those who reject it as 'those who did wrong' (*alladhīna ẓalamū*). Such references occur in more than ten places. For example: ... *and do not plead with Me for those who are wrongdoers* ... (11:37); *The Cry seized those who were wrongdoers* (11:67); *Such were ʿĀd: they impugned the signs of their Lord and disobeyed His messengers, and followed the dictates*

*of every obdurate tyrant* (11:59); *Indeed Thamūd defied their Lord* (11:68); *Away with Midian!—just as Thamūd was done away with!* (11:95).

Note that God expressed their rejection or acceptance of the divine call, and in contrast to the and construction, with a past tense verb, which indicates the mere fact of its occurrence in objective reality. Outside the scope of comparison and relation with other things, however, it is expressed as an adjective, as in *Then it was said, 'Away with the wrongdoing lot!'* (11:44), and *never far from the wrongdoers* (11:83), and *So do not turn your backs as guilty ones* (11:52), among many others.

The context of this comparison and its relation to accepting or rejecting the divine call means that it is sufficient to acknowledge that this is something that has occurred. It also shows that they were labelled either believers or wrongdoers, and there was no need to mention being characterized by or persisting in either of these traits. Therefore, saying 'they wronged', 'they disobeyed', and 'they followed Pharaoh's dictates' implies they were labelled with the trait of wrongdoing, disobedience, and following Pharaoh's dictates, respectively. The meaning of 'And We delivered those who had faith' is 'We saved those who were labelled with the trait of faith and were known by its marks.'

Using a past tense verb is sufficient to indicate the basic act of labelling mentioned, even if it implies being characterized by it. To put it another way, 'those who did wrong' (*alladhīna ẓalamū*) among Noah's people thereby became wrongdoers (*ẓālimīn*), but the focus here, based on the context of the verse, is on the occurrence of their wrongdoing, not on it becoming an inseparable characteristic of them thereafter. Hence, whenever the speech moves away from the context of comparison and relation, it reverts to expressing a characteristic, such as: *'Away with the wrongdoing lot!'* (11:44), and ... *and do not be with the faithless!* (11:42). Pay attention to this point.

From this, the reason for the differing explanations of the phrase, *the wrongdoers*, becomes clear. Some have taken it to signify merely the commission of any wrongdoing, while others interpret it as a descriptive term, meaning 'do not incline towards the wrongdoers.' In his commentary *al-Manār*, Rashīd Riḍā explains that al-Zamakhsharī understood *the wrongdoers* as referring to 'those from whom wrong has been experienced', instead of merely saying 'the wrongdoers' using the active

participle, *al-ẓālimīn*. It is narrated that al-Muwaffaq prayed behind the *imām* and recited this verse, and subsequently fainted. When he regained consciousness, he was asked about it, and he remarked, 'If this pertains to those who incline towards doing wrong. Then how will it be for the actual wrongdoer?'

The implication here is that the threat in the verse encompasses those who incline, no matter how slightly, towards someone who has committed a minor wrong, or any form of injustice. However, this understanding is also flawed. The intended meaning of *the wrongdoers* in the verse refers to the group of wrongdoers among the enemies of the believers; those who harm them and try to turn them away from their religion, primarily the idolaters. They are akin to *the faithless* (11:42) in many other verses, which are intended to target a specific group of disbelievers, not every individual who has disbelieved in the past. An apt example is the verse from Surah Al-Baqarah (2:6): *As for the faithless, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not have faith.*

Now, the people addressed by this prohibition are the same as those mentioned in the preceding verse which states, *So go aright, just as you have been commanded—and whoever has turned with you* (11:112).

In this chapter, these idolatrous enemies are referred to as *the wrongdoers*, just as they are described in relation to the earlier messengers in this chapter, as in verses 37, 67, and 94. They are also referred to as wrongdoers like in the verse, *Then it was said, 'Away with the wrongdoing lot!'* (11:44). There is no distinction in these verses between using an adjectival construction (like *al-ẓālimīn*) and a verbal construction (like *alladhīna ẓalamū*), for they both convey the same meaning in this context.

As for the explanation given by al-Zamakhsharī in *al-Kashshāf*, namely that what is meant by *alladhīna ẓalamū* is 'those from whom wrong has been experienced', instead of merely saying 'the wrongdoers' using the active participle, *al-ẓālimīn*: While this is correct, it does not benefit his argument. For, even if there is a verbal construct at work, as we have established in this context, it doesn't provide more than the realization of the event it describes, and, therefore, it still aligns with the adjectival meaning, as we can observe in the verse from *Sūrah al-Nāzi'āt* (79:41), where it uses a verb that also serves the function of an adjective.

As for the claim made by the author of *al-Manār*, that 'the intended

meaning of "*the wrongdoers*" in the verse is the group of wrongdoers from among the enemies of the believers who harm and turn them away from their faith, namely the idolaters' this is a mere assertion. What evidence suggests that the verse is limited to the idolaters and doesn't include the People of the Book, when God has recently mentioned them among the wrongdoers in various instances in His Book where He describes them differing about the Book of God out of envy amongst themselves. Indeed, God has prohibited befriending them and emphasized this in verses such as, *Any of you who allies with them is indeed one of them* (5:51), and in reference to befriending any disbeliever, *and whoever does that Allah will have nothing to do with him* (3:28).

But what prevents the verse from encompassing the wrongdoers of this community, among whom are those more wretched than the tyrants of ʿĀd and Thamūd, and more rebellious than Pharaoh, Haman, and Korah?

Just because Islam, at the time of this chapter's revelation, was afflicted by the Quraysh and the idolaters of Mecca and its surroundings, tis does not necessitate a limitation in the meaning of these words. After all, it is an accepted principle that the specifics of a context do not restrict the general wording of a text. Thus, the verse forbids inclining towards anyone characterized by the trait of wrongdoing, be it an idolater, monotheist, Muslim, or someone from the People of the Book.

As for the verse, *As for the faithless, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not have faith* (2:6), its meaning is adjectival, even if it is phrased verbally: In other words, it does not mean all individuals, but rather those who have committed disbelief in the past. We have previously commented on this verse and others in the Qur'an, clarifying that it specifically addresses the leaders of Quraysh who opposed the Prophet from the onset, until God protected the Prophet from them and vanquished them at Badr and elsewhere. They are referred to as 'those who disbelieved' (*alladhīna kafarū*—translated as '*the faithless*'). The verse is not general, for had it been so, and if it referred to all disbelievers as some claim, the verse would not hold true given the numerous conversions of people from a state of disbelief to belief, even among the disbelievers of Mecca after the revelation of this verse.

Now, if one were to argue that the verse refers to those who did not believe until the end of their lives, the verse becomes redundant, as saying

'disbelievers who do not believe until the end of their lives will not believe' is self-evident. Thus, the only option left is to read it as a specific verse rather than a general one, with 'those who disbelieved' (translated as *the faithless*) referring to a particular group rather than every individual disbeliever.

We have previously mentioned that 'those who have believed' (translated as *the faithful*), unless evidence suggests otherwise, is an honorary title for those who believed in the Prophet at the onset of his call to the truth. They are specifically addressed in the Qur'anic verses beginning with *'O you who have believed* ...,' even if others share in the rulings with them.

Regarding the statement at the end of the discussion: The adversaries, the polytheists, are referred to as '*the wrongdoers*' just as previous communities in their stories within this chapter were. They are also referred to as '*the wrongdoers*.' There is no distinction between the two expressions. The conclusion is that referring to them sometimes as 'those who have wronged' and sometimes as 'the wrongdoers' indicates that both terms aim to convey the same meaning.

In this, it seems the subtlety of linguistic attention, previously hinted at, eluded the author of *al-Manār* as, just because these two terms refer to the same things, this does not necessitate that they refer to them with the same concern.

The verse essentially instructs the Prophet and his community to avoid relying on or seeking support from those characterized by wrongdoing. They incline lean towards them or rely on their wrongdoing in matters of their religion or religious lives. This is what is meant by the saying: *And do not incline toward the wrongdoers*.

The phrase, *lest the Fire should touch you*, follows as a consequence of inclining toward the wrongdoers. The implication is that the result of leaning towards the wrongdoers is being touched by the fire. The outcome of relying on the injustice of the wrongdoers is being touched by the fire, whereas the direct act of committing injustice itself leads to the fire. This distinguishes between approaching wrongdoing and being enmeshed in the act of wrongdoing itself.

The phrase, *and you will not have any friend besides Allah*, is an adverbial qualifier for the phrase, *lest the Fire should touch you*. It suggests that when the fire touches you, you'll have no friend to protect you besides God, especially on the Day of Judgement when all other allies apart from

Him will be absent. Alternatively, in the context of leaning towards the wrongdoers, if the fire here signifies punishment, then the phrase means there will be no divine assistance in such a state.

The use of the preposition *then* in the phrase *then you will not be helped* indicates a conclusion to the matter, highlighting a fate of disappointment and abandonment. This is as if to say: 'The fire will touch you, and with no one but God to turn to, you will call upon Him and He will not respond; you will seek His aid and He will not help. This culminates in a state of loss, disappointment, and abandonment.'

From the analysis of the verse, several points arise:

Firstly, what is actually prohibited in the verse is inclining towards or seeking support from the wrongdoers in matters of religion or religious life. This could manifest as remaining silent about the truths of the religion regarding issues that might upset them, neglecting to perform religious duties they disapprove of, allowing them to lead the community, emulating their general practices, or conducting religious affairs with their help and power, and the like.

However, relying on them in mundane transactions or day-to-day interactions such as buying and selling, trusting them, or relying on them in certain matters is not included in the prohibition of this verse. This is because this does not entailing on them in matters of religion or religious life. For instance, when the Prophet left Mecca by night and took refuge in the cave, he relied on an idol-worshipper by hiring a mount for the journey and trusted him to deliver it to the cave after three days. Moreover, the Muslims, within the sight and hearing of the Prophet , continued to interact and trade with the idol worshippers and disbelievers.

The second point is that the form of inclination (*rukūn*) prohibited in the verse is more specific than the allegiance (*wilāya*) cautioned against in many other verses. Allegiance refers to drawing near to those who might influence Muslims with their religion, their morals, or the wrongful practices prevalent in their societies, given that they are enemies of the faith. In contrast, inclining towards them only refers to basing one's religion or religious life on their wrongdoing. Therefore, inclination is more specific than allegiance. In essence, in every instance where there is inclination, there is also an aspect of allegiance, but not vice versa. The difference is that the influence expressed by inclination is active, while in allegiance, it

is not always so.

However, other commentators argue that the inclination prohibited in this verse is, in fact, synonymous with the allegiance (*wilāya*) with the disbelievers warned against in other verses. In *al-Manār*, Rashīd Riḍā, after quoting al-Zamakhsharī, explains: 'The prohibition in the verse covers various behaviors: Acceding to their desires, breaking away from the community to be with them, associating and socializing with them, visiting them, appeasing them, approving of their actions, imitating them, adopting their attire, admiring their allurements, and any act that elevates their status. Considering the phrase, *do not incline*, it is worth noting that inclination (*rukūn*) implies a slight leaning towards them. Furthermore, when the verse (literally) states, "those who did wrong" instead of "wrongdoers", it specifies those recognized for their wrongdoings.

While all these behaviors Rashīd Riḍā associates with inclination are naturally unsuitable and should be avoided by believers, it is not accurate to treat them as direct explanations of the verse's intent. The primary addressees of this verse are the Prophet Muḥammad and the early converts to Islam who first renounced idol worship to embrace faith alongside him. None of them ever showed any inclination to align with the wrongdoers of the idol worship or to indulge in their desires or approve of their deeds.'

There is a further contradiction in Rashīd Riḍā's interpretation. On the one hand, he acknowledges that some of these behaviors are part of what inclination entails, but then down plays them and denies that the verse includes them. Every sinful act is significant and should not be taken lightly. However, many commentators have a tendency to attribute certain leniencies to God's pronouncements. Even more problematic is Riḍā's claim that the primary audience of this warning was the Prophet Muḥammad and the early Muslims, since it implies that this address is exclusively for them. However, the message of this verse is universal, directed at the Prophet and his entire community, with no differentiation between earlier and later followers. The temporal precedence of some over others does not limit the message's comprehensiveness, especially when the language of the text includes all of them.

Secondly, the fact that the addressee is not expected to commit a sin does not preclude God prohibiting it, especially prohibitions that come from a legislative perspective. However, this does prevent excessive emphasis

or insistence upon it. The Prophet was forbidden from acts greater than inclining towards those who do wrong, such as associating partners with God and neglecting the proclamation of some of His commands and prohibitions. God said: *Certainly it has been revealed to you and to those before you: 'If you ascribe a partner to Allah your works shall fail and you shall surely be among the losers* (39:65). And He said *O Messenger! Communicate that which has been sent down to you from your Lord, and if you do not, you will not have communicated His message, and Allah shall protect you from the people. Indeed Allah does not guide the faithless lot* (5:67). And He said: *And follow that which is revealed to you from your Lord. Indeed Allah is well aware of what you do* (33:2). It is unimaginable to think that the Prophet would associate partners with his Lord, neglect what was revealed to him, obey the disbelievers and hypocrites, or not follow what was revealed to him, among other prohibitions.

Similarly, the earliest Muslims were forbidden from acts greater or equal to the mentioned act of inclining towards the wrongdoers. For instance, He said: *And beware of a punishment which shall not visit the wrongdoers among you exclusively* (8:25), which revealed about the Battle of Badr participants, including the earliest predecessors. God even refers to some of them as 'those who have done wrong' (*alladhīna ẓalamū*), which is a more severe phrasing than *and do not incline toward the wrongdoers*. Other prohibitions in the Qur'an about the Battles of Badr, Uḥud, and Ḥunayn, as well as those directed at the Prophet's wives, all concerned deeds that were not expected of the earliest predecessors, though some of them faced some of these challenges later.

Thirdly, given the context of the verse, it prohibits inclining towards the wrongdoers in matters in which they do wrong. That is, no part of elevating the true religion of Muslims, or their religious life should be based on any part of their wrongdoing. This means being mindful in proclaiming the truth and acting in accordance with it of the wrongs and falsehoods of the unjust, to the extent that it might rejuvenate the truth because of the revival of falsehood, or it might lead to reviving one truth by suppressing another, as previously indicated. However, inclining towards some of their wrongdoings, incorporating it into the religion, or practicing it within the Muslim community or personal life, is not just leaning towards the wrongdoers, but actually becoming one of them.

This matter has a source of confusion to many commentators, leading them to discuss topics unrelated to the verse in question. We have chosen to omit those explanations and discussions about their accuracy and relevance for the sake of brevity. Those interested in further details should consult the works of these exegeses.

وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ طَرَفَيِ النَّهَارِ وَزُلَفًا مِنَ اللَّيْلِ ۚ إِنَّ الْحَسَنَاتِ يُذْهِبْنَ السَّيِّئَاتِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ ذِكْرَىٰ لِلذَّاكِرِينَ ﴿١١٤﴾

(11:114) Maintain the prayer at the two ends of the day, and during the early hours of the night (*zulfan*). Indeed good deeds efface misdeeds. That is an admonition for the mindful.

*The two ends of the day* refers to the morning and evening, and the word *zulaf* is the plural form of *zulfā*, just as *qurb* is the plural of *qurbā*. It denotes a period close to the described entity, like hours and the like. Hence, the intended meaning is the hours of the night that are closest to the day.

Therefore, the meaning is: 'Maintain the prayer in the morning and evening and during the hours of the night that are closest to the day. This aligns with the five daily prayers, specifically the *fajr* (dawn) prayer, *'aṣr* (late afternoon) prayer—which is the evening or *masā'* prayer—and *maghrib* (sunset) and *'ishā'* (night) prayers. The latter two are considered part of *the early hours of the night*, as some scholars have proposed. Alternatively, it could refer to the *fajr*, *maghrib*—which fall at the two ends of the day—and *'ishā'*, which falls during the early hours of the night, as others have suggested. There are other interpretations as well.

However, since this investigation has jurisprudential implications, the primary reference point is the clarifications provided by the Prophet , and the Imams from his household . Therefore, these will be discussed further in our analysis of the narrations.

***Indeed good deeds efface misdeeds ...*** explains the rationale for the command to *Maintain the prayer ...*, by explaining that prayers are virtuous acts that eliminate the negative traces of sins—those imperfections that afflict souls. Discussion on this topic has been covered earlier in the chapter on the failure of deeds (*ḥabṭ*).

***That is an admonition for the mindful ...*** means that the

aforementioned principle—that good deeds counteract bad ones—is a form of admonition for those devoted to the remembrance of God.

وَاصْبِرْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١١٥﴾

**(11:115) And be patient; indeed Allah does not waste the reward of the virtuous.**

God then commands the faithful to patience after commanding them to maintain the prayer, much like the pairing found in His statement: *And take recourse in patience and prayer* ... (2:45). This is because both commands, in their respective realms, reflect the most fundamental pillars of Islam: Prayer in terms of acts of worship (*'ibādāt*) and patience in terms of moral virtues (*akhlāq*). God has said about prayer: *and the remembrance of Allah is surely greater* (29:45) and about patience: *that is indeed the steadiest of courses* (42:43). Combining both is the best means to seek God's support during adversities and hardships. While patience safeguards the soul from distress and despair, prayer directs it towards God, making it forget the hardships it faces. An elaboration on this can be found in our commentary on verse 2:45.

The directive to *be patient* suggests a broader connotation of patience: Patience in the sense of steadfastness in worship, patience in the sense of refraining from sins, and patience in the sense of enduring adversities. Thus, it implies patience with regard to all the preceding directives and prohibitions, referencing commands such as *So go aright*, *and do not overstep*, *do not incline*, and *Maintain the prayer*.

However, the specificity of the command and the fact it is addressed specifically to the Prophet indicates that this patience pertains to something unique to him. If not, one might say the command *be patient* is consistent with the general context. This supports the view of those who argue that what was meant is: 'be patient by enduring the harm you receive from your people as you call them to God and against the oppression of the wrongdoers amongst them.' As for the command, *Maintain the prayer*, it is not a directive for a specific prayer unique to the Prophet . Instead, it is a command for the collective prayer alongside the believers. Hence, it is a command for all of them to pray collectively, and the verse should be understood in this fashion.

The statement, ... *indeed Allah does not waste the reward of the virtuous*, provides a rationale for the command to be patient.

فَلَوْلَا كَانَ مِنَ الْقُرُونِ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ أُولُو بَقِيَّةٍ يَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْفَسَادِ فِي
الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِمَّنْ أَنْجَيْنَا مِنْهُمْ ۗ وَاتَّبَعَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مَا أُتْرِفُوا فِيهِ
وَكَانُوا مُجْرِمِينَ ﴿١١٦﴾

(11:116) Why were there not among the generations before you a remnant (of the wise) who might forbid corruption in the earth, except a few of those whom We delivered from among them? Those who were wrongdoers pursued that in which they had been granted affluence, and they were a guilty lot.

The phrase, *Why were there not* ..., can be understood as expressing surprise and conveying a rebuke. The meaning is: 'Would that there were people, from the generations before you that we destroyed, who remained and prevented corruption on the earth, thereby reforming it and preserving their communities from extinction.'

The phrase, *except a few of those whom We delivered*, is an exception from the preceding negation, meaning: 'It is surprising that from amongst the past generations, despite witnessing God's signs and punishments, there were not many who prevented corruption on the earth, except a few whom God saved from His punishment; they were the ones who did prevent corruption.'

And in saying, *Those who were wrongdoers pursued that in which they had been granted affluence, and they were a guilty lot*, God describes the condition of the remaining majority after the exception of the previous passage. They are primarily identified as the wrongdoers, who immersed themselves in worldly pleasures and were also the guilty lot.

This distinction between the saved and the remaining majority, whose condition is described, effectively classifies people into two contrasting groups: those saved by God's mercy and the criminals. Thus, it follows with, "Had your Lord willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will continue to differ except whom your Lord has given mercy."

وَمَا كَانَ رَبُّكَ لِيُهْلِكَ الْقُرَىٰ بِظُلْمٍ وَأَهْلُهَا مُصْلِحُونَ ﴿١١٧﴾

(11:117) Your Lord would never destroy the townships unjustly while their inhabitants were bringing about reform.

This means that it is not part of God's divine precedent to destroy towns where its inhabitants were people who sought to bring about good and reform. Such an act would be an injustice, and your Lord does not wrong anyone. Therefore, when God says '*unjustly*', it serves as a clarifying qualification (*qayd tawḍīḥī*), not a restrictive one (*qayd iḥtirāzī*), meaning that it illustrates that God's divine practice is not to destroy towns that seek good because that would be an injustice: ... *and your Lord is not tyrannical to the servants* (41:46).

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً ۖ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ ﴿١١٨﴾ إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ رَبُّكَ ۚ وَلِذَٰلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ ۗ وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَةُ رَبِّكَ لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿١١٩﴾

(11:118-119) Had your Lord wished, He would have made mankind one community; but they continue to differ (*lā yazālūna mukhtalifīn*) except those on whom your Lord has mercy—and that is why He created them—and the word of your Lord has been fulfilled: 'I will surely fill hell with jinn and humans, all together!'

The word *khalf* ('back', from whence *mukhtalifīn* is derived) is the opposite of *quddām* ('fore') and this meaning can be observed in its various derivatives. For instance, when one says '*khalafa abā-hu*,' meaning 'he succeeded his father,' it signifies that he sat in his father's place or continued living after his father passed away. Similarly, when it is said '*akhlafa wa'da-hu*', meaning 'he broke his promise', it implies that he threw his promise behind him. And when one says '*fulān māt wa khalafa ibnan*'—meaning 'so-and-so died and left a son behind'—it suggests that he left a child in his wake, and departed. Also, when it is said '*fulān istakhlafa fulānan*'—meaning 'one appointed another as his successor'—it conveys the idea that he wanted him to be his representative following his absence or death, much like when Adam was made God's representative (*khalīfa*) on

Earth. Additionally, when one says '*fulān khālaf fulana*' or '*takhālufā*'—meaning 'one opposed the other' or 'they opposed each other'—it denotes that they parted ways in opinion or deed, as if each turned their back on the other. The meaning of '*takhallaf 'an amri-hi*' is 'he neglected his command', implying that he left behind his order and did not act upon it. The meaning of '*ikhtalaf al-qawm fi kadhā*'—or 'people disagreed on such-and-such a matter'—is that they turned their backs on each other. Lastly, '*ikhtalaf fulān ilā fulān*' means '*one frequented the another*' indicating a regularly coming and going to him.

This *ikhtilāf* (difference or divergence), which stands in contrast to the meaning of *ittifāq* (agreement or convergence), is something which a healthy temperament disapproves of. Indeed, all natural inclinations recognise that with divergence, people's energy becomes dispersed and weakened. Certainly, other negative consequences such as disputes, altercations, brawls, killings, animosities, and hostilities also arise from it. Each of these, in turn, significantly undermines peace and well-being.

There exists a type of disagreement which is inevitable in the realm of humanity: the divergence of temperaments that ultimately leads to differences in structures. Indeed, physical compositions vary among individuals, and this difference in physical make-up results in differences in people's physical and mental capacities. Coupled with the variations in environments and climates, differences in tastes, traditions, etiquettes, goals, and individual and collective behaviors emerge within human societies. Research in the field of social sciences have all but confirmed that without these differences, humans would not thrive for even a blink of an eye.

God has called attention to this in His book and attributed it to Himself, saying, *It is We who have dispensed among them their livelihood in the present life, and raised some of them above others in rank, so that some may take others into service, and your Lord's mercy is better than what they amass* (43:32). God does not criticize this kind of differentiation in His words unless it is driven by human desires in a direction that contradicts the guidance of reason.

Disagreement in religion is not from God. He mentions that He has innately designed humans to recognise Him and believe in His Oneness. He has fashioned the human soul, inspiring both its wickedness and righteousness. The pure religion aligns with this innate disposition upon which

He created humans; God's creation does not change. Therefore, the Qur'an attributes any religious disagreements to the hostility and wrongdoing of those who differ, as stated, *But they did not differ except after knowledge had come to them, out of envy among themselves* (45:17).

God encapsulated both types of differences when He said: *Mankind were a single community; then Allah sent the prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He sent down with them the Book with the truth, that it may judge between the people concerning that about which they differed* ...—this refers to the first kind of disagreement, which occurs between people, namely in everyday life—... *and none differed in it except those who had been given it, after the manifest proofs had come to them, out of envy among themselves. Then Allah guided those who had faith to the truth of what they differed in, by His will* (2:213)—this refers to the second kind of disagreement, which occurs in matters of religion. Thus, God clarifies the nature of differences in His words.

What He means by saying, *Had your Lord wished, He would have made mankind one community*, is that He would have eliminated their differences and united them upon a single creed. It is evident that this is a response to their religious disputes that are mentioned in the preceding verses and their division into groups, some being saved by God, though they are few, and others are the wrongdoers. This implies that even though they differ in religion, they cannot hope to challenge God. If God willed, He would have made them one nation without differences in religion. This is similar to His statement, *With Allah rests guidance to the straight path, and some of them are devious, and had He wished He would have guided you all* (16:9) and *Have not the faithful yet realized that had Allah wished He would have guided mankind all together?* (13:31).

Based on this, His saying, *but they continue to differ*, specifically refers to differences in religion. That is the only thing He mentions could be eliminated if He so willed. The implied meaning is: 'if God had willed, He would have removed their differences, but He did not will it, so they will continue to differ.'

However, His statement, *except those on whom your Lord has mercy*, explicitly indicates that He has removed such disagreements from amongst those to whom He has shown mercy. As for non-religious differences, God did not remove them even from the group that received His mercy. Only

the religious differences, which He disapproves of and associates with enmity after acquiring true knowledge, are lifted from them.

The statement, *except those on whom your Lord has mercy*, is an exception to the phrase, *but they continue to differ*. This means people will perpetually differ with one another concerning the truth, except those whom God has shown mercy. For they do not differ concerning the truth, nor do they deviate from it. This mercy refers to divine guidance, as indicated by the verse, *Then Allah guided those who had faith to the truth of what they differed in, by His will* (2:213).

If one argues that people differing amongst themselves means that some affirm a belief while others deny it, making the meaning of *but they continue to differ* suggest that they are perpetually divided into right and wrong, then the exception would only pertain to certain times and not individuals. According to this reading, the implication of the phrase *except those on whom your Lord has mercy* is that there are always those who are wrong and those who are right, except for those whom God has mercy upon. These individuals are not divided, but are solely on the path of truth. It is understood that those exempted are on the side of truth, which makes the statement analogous to saying that among them, there are those in error and those who are correct, and the correct ones are entirely correct, without any error. However, this is a redundant statement.

Exempting those who are correct from the principle that they will continue to differ makes no sense, as they would still be counted among the people who differ, as both the people in the right and those in the wrong engaged in disagreement.

To this, I respond: The disagreement mentioned in this verse and in other verses that criticize those who disagree, specifically refers to those who differ concerning the truth and oppose one another about it. Although this implies that some of them are on the right path and possess insight, when disagreement is attributed to the collective body or community, it highlights the community's doubt, their deviation from the truth, their failure to unify upon it, and their abandonment of it. This leads to the truth being concealed from them and their doubt in it.

God Almighty criticizes such disagreement because of its inherently negative qualities, such as division and turning away from the truth. The verses attest to this, as God condemns all of those who differ because of

their disagreement, not just those among them who are wrong. If the intended meaning of those who differ was just those with differing opinions or actions that deviate from the truth, then this would not be valid.

The most compelling evidence for this position is His statement, *He has prescribed for you the religion which He had enjoined upon Noah and which We have (also) revealed to you, and which We had enjoined upon Abraham, Moses and Jesus, declaring, 'Maintain the religion, and do not be divided in it'* (42:13), where He equates disagreement with division. Similarly, the verse, *'This indeed is my straight path, so follow it, and do not follow (other) ways, for they will separate you from His way* (6:153), provides even clearer evidence. This places those who adhere to the truth and stay on His path outside the realm of division and disagreement.

Hence, you will notice that, in many instances, when God mentions their disagreements in the Qur'an, He couples it with their doubt about it. This is exemplified in His statement in the previously mentioned verses: *Certainly We gave Moses the Book, but differences arose about it, and were it not for a prior decree of your Lord, a decision would have been made between them; indeed they are in grave doubt concerning it* (11:110). This message is reiterated in various parts of His discourse.

God also says: *What is it about which they question each other?! About the great tiding, the one about which they differ?* (78:1–3) Meaning, each person presents an opinion that diverts them from the truth, leading to their division. God proclaims: *indeed you are of different opinions! He is turned away from it who has been turned away. Perish the liars* (51:10). This refers to statements that are not based on understanding or grounded in knowledge. Instead, conjecture and suspicion are the source of these views that lead to disagreement.

In this context, God says: *O People of the Book! Why do you mix the truth with falsehood, and conceal the truth while you know?* (3:71). Their blameworthy act in this verse is presenting views resembling the truth, but devoid of it. This act brings about disagreement which obscures the real truth.

Their disagreements are manifested as differing opinions and views that divert them from the truth, resulting in doubt. Because they follow their desires that run contrary to the truth, they present their false opinions in various forms, mirroring the appearance of truth. This is done with the aim

of clouding people's understanding out of envy and hostility, even though they are aware of what the truth is. It is their contention with the truth, despite their knowledge of it, that is driven by these internal animosities.

From the above, it is evident that when God says, *and that is why He created them*, He is referring to the mercy mentioned in *except those on whom your Lord has mercy*. The fact that the Arabic word *raḥma* ('mercy') is grammatically feminine does not preclude the use of the masculine demonstrative pronoun *dhālika* ('that') to refer to it, because verbal nouns can be treated as both masculine and feminine, as in God's saying: *indeed Allah's mercy* (raḥma) *is close* (qarīb) *to the virtuous* (7:56).[1]

God says this because their disagreements arise out of malice amongst themselves, causing them to deviate from the truth, while also obscuring it and magnifying falsehood. It is inconceivable that falsehood is the actual purpose of God's creation. There is no rationale for God to create a human world where they oppress one another, extinguish the truth, and promote falsehood, only to then destroy and eternally punish them. The Qur'an refutes this with all of its statements, as does the present verse, emphasizing as it does that God compassionately and mercifully calls people towards their own welfare and happiness. He does not wish harm or injustice for them. However, due to their own oppression and disagreements with the truth, they reject His call, deny His signs, worship others, and cause corruption on earth, thus becoming deserving of His punishment. God says He would not destroy the communities unjustly while their people are reformers, nor would He create them for them to commit injustice and corruption, then destroy them. What emanates from Him is mercy and guidance, while the malice, discord, and oppression stem from people's own selves, a sentiment that is encapsulated within the context of these verses.

God's mercy, by which I mean humankinds guidance, is the primary purpose of creation because of its connection to the humankinds ultimate goal, which is happiness and felicity (*saʿāda*). This is evident in the verse that relates the words of the people of Paradise: *All praise belongs to Allah, who guided us to this* (7:43). This is similar to considering worship an end

1 Translator's note: The adjective *qarīb* used to qualify the verbal noun *raḥma* is grammatically masculine, even while *raḥma* appears grammatically feminine. This substantiates the author's point that verbal nouns can be treated as both masculine and feminine.

in itself due to its connection to felicity and human flourishing, as stated in: *I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me* (51:56).

***... and the word of your Lord has been fulfilled: 'I will surely fill hell with jinn and humans, all together!'*** This means that God's decree has been realized and His promise has been validated by those who wronged themselves and disagreed about the truth after knowledge came to them out of enmity among themselves. And the term '*word*' (kalima) here refers to: '*I will surely fill hell ...*'

This verse is similar in meaning to: *Had We wished We would have given every soul its guidance, but My word became due: 'Surely I will fill hell with all the jinn and humans.'* (32:13). The origin of this statement is what God Almighty said to Iblis, the Accursed, when he stated: *'By Your might, I will surely pervert them, except Your exclusive servants among them.' He said, 'The truth is that—and I speak the truth—I will surely fill hell with you and all of those who follow you'* (38:85). These verses are consistent in their content and clarify one other's meaning.

Reflecting on the meanings of these verses, we can derive the following conclusions:

Firstly, when God says, *Had your Lord wished, He would have made mankind one community*, it means uniting them by eliminating differences and disagreements among them. Some say it refers to compelling everyone to submit and removing free will. However, this would have contradicted the principle of moral accountability (*taklīf*), and hence God did not do it. Some attribute this view to Qatāda. Others say the meaning is that if He willed, He could have gathered everyone together in Paradise, but He wanted to reward you for your deeds, a viewpoint attributed to Abū Muslim. It is evident, based on their context, that the present verses do not support either interpretation.

Secondly, when He says, ... *but they continue to differ,* He means they will persistently disagree concerning the religion, implying a departure from the truth, which is then masked and depicted in various false images resembling the truth. Some interpret this to mean differences in livelihoods and conditions, essentially differences that are non-religious, a viewpoint attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. However, the reader will be well aware from our previous discussions that this does not match the context of the

preceding verses. Others argue that '*differ*' here implies that some follow their predecessors blindly and engage in the same falsehoods as they did, an explanation that, like the previous one, is at odds with the context of the verses. This is further elucidated in the verse, *Certainly We gave Moses the Book, but differences arose about it* ... (3:93).

Thirdly, the statement, *except those on whom your Lord has mercy* is a reference to those whom God has guided among the believers.

Fourthly, the demonstrative pronoun '*that*' in the phrase, *and that is why He created them*, refers to mercy, which is the ultimate goal God intended for His creation, so they might find true happiness and felicity. Some have argued that the intended meaning is that God created humankind for discord and disagreement, attributing this opinion to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and 'Atā'. However, the reader will note that this reading is rather superficial and weak. Yes, if the pronoun '*them*' in '*He created them*' is taken to refer to the rest of humankind after the exception of *those on whom your Lord has mercy*, then, considering discord as a purpose of the remainder's creation would be plausible. This would make the verse somewhat parallel in meaning to His statement, *Certainly We have created for hell many of the jinn and humans* (7:179).

Others have argued that the demonstrative pronoun refers to the entirety of what the discourse indicates about God's will in creating them, namely that they are predisposed to disagreements and divisions in their knowledge, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and everything that follows, such as their will and choices in practice. This includes matters of religion, faith, obedience, and disobedience. In essence, the primary objective is disagreement and difference in general, whether it is religious or otherwise.

This view has been attributed to Ibn 'Abbās based on what has been narrated from him, namely that he said: 'God created them as two groups: One group He has mercy upon and they do not differ, and another group He does not have mercy upon and they do differ.' Malik b. Anas is reported to have said concerning the meaning of the verse: 'God created them so that there would be a group in paradise and a group in hellfire.' However, the foolishness of such explanations should be plain to the discerning reader. Therefore, we will not waste time by dwelling on them further.

Fifthly, the meaning of *and the word of your Lord has been fulfilled* refers to its realization and its actualization in objective reality.

## Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding the verse, *Your Lord will indeed recompense everyone fully for their works* (11:111), it is said that Imām ʿAlī commented, 'It pertains to the Day of Resurrection.'

(2) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, both Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Abū al-Shaykh narrate from al-Ḥasan, who narrated regarding the verse, *So go aright, just as you have been commanded—and whoever has turned with you* (11:112): 'When this verse was revealed, he exclaimed, 'Be firm! Be firm!' and from then on, he was never seen to laugh.'

(3) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, regarding the verse, *So go aright, just as you have been commanded*: Ibn ʿAbbās remarked, 'No verse was revealed to the Prophet that was harder or more demanding on him than this one. This is why, when his companions noted, "Your hair has turned grey so quickly, O Messenger of God," he responded, "The chapters *Hūd* and *al-Wāqiʿa* have turned my hair grey!"

**Author's comment:** The well-known phrasing of the tradition is, '*Hūd* and its sisters have turned my hair grey', though the lack of content in *al-Wāqiʿa* that mirrors the verse, *So go aright, just as you have been commanded*, suggests it may not have been this verse being specifically referred to in the narration. The theme common to both chapters is their discourse about the Day of Resurrection.

(4) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse, *And do not incline toward the wrongdoers* (11:113), it is said that Imām ʿAlī commented: 'To incline means to show them affection, give them sincere advice, and to obey them."

**Author's comment:** This tradition is also narrated *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, with a disconnected chain from the Infallibles .

(5) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is narrated from ʿUthmān b. ʿĪsā, from a man, from Imām al-Ṣādiq about the verse, *And do not incline toward the wrongdoers, lest the Fire should touch you*, He said: 'Indeed, He did not make it an eternal punishment for them, but a deterrent *lest the Fire should touch you*, so do not incline towards them.'

**Author's comment:** Instead of saying 'the Fire will seize you', He said it will 'touch you', making it a brief touch.

(6) In the same source, it is narrated from Jarīr from Imām al-Ṣādiq , about the verse, *Maintain the prayer at the two ends of the day* (11:114): 'The two ends refer to dusk and dawn, *and during the early hours of the night* pertains to the final evening prayer (*'ishā'*).'

(7) In *Tahdhīb al-Ahkām*, Shaykh al-Ṭūsī narrates via a chain of narrators from Zurāra from Imām al-Bāqir , discussing the five daily prayers, God's statement, *Maintain the prayer at the two ends of the day, and during the early hours of the night*: 'it is the final evening prayer.'

**Author's comment:** I would note that the tradition clearly suggests the explanation of *the two ends of the day* as the period before noon and after, encompassing the five daily prayer times.

(8) In *Maʿānī al-Akhbār*, al-Ṣadūq transmits via his chain of narration from Ibrāhīm b. ʿUmar, who heard from someone, who reported from Imām al-Ṣādiq regarding the words of God Almighty, *Indeed good deeds efface misdeeds*: 'The believer's night prayer (*salāt al-mu'min bi al-layl*) erases the sins committed during the day.'

**Author's comment:** This tradition is also narrated in *al-Kāfī*, *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, the *Amālī* of Shaykh al-Mufīd, and the *Amālī* of Shaykh al-Ṭūsī.

(9) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī narrates from al-Wāḥidī, with a chain of transmitters going back to Ḥammād b. Salama, who heard from ʿAlī b. Zayd, who reported from Abū ʿUthmān, who said: 'I was with Salmān under a tree when he took a dry twig from it and shook it until its leaves fell off. He then said, "O Abū ʿUthmān, won't you ask me why I did that?" I said, "Why did you do that?" He replied, "The Messenger of God , did the same when I was with him under a tree. He took a dry twig, shook it until its leaves fell off, and then asked, "Won't you ask me, O Salmān, why I did this?" I asked, "Why did you do it?" He said, "When a Muslim performs ablution properly and then prays the five daily prayers, his sins fall from him just as these leaves fell from the twig." He then recited this verse *Maintain the prayer...* to the end of it.'

**Author's comment:** This narration is also quoted in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, narrated by al-Ṭayālīsī, Aḥmad, al-Dāramī, Ibn Jarīr, al-Ṭabarānī, al-Baghawī in his *Muʿjam*, and Ibn Mardawayh, without a

complete chain.

(10) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, with a chain going back to al-Ḥārith, it is reported from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib who said: 'We were with the Messenger of God in the mosque waiting for the prayer when a man stood up and said, "O Messenger of God, I have committed a sin." The Prophet ignored him. But after the Prophet completed the prayer, the man repeated his statement. The Prophet said, "Didn't you just pray with us and perform a proper ablution?" The man replied, "Yes." The Prophet said, "That prayer has atoned for your sin."'

**Author's comment:** This narration is transmitted through many chains from Ibn Masʿūd, Abī Umāma, Muʿādh b. Jabal, Ibn ʿAbbās, Burayda, Wāthila b. al-Asqaʿ, Anas, and others, although the precise details of the story differ from one person to another. It is narrated by al-Tirmidhī and others from Abū al-Yusr, who is the main person in the story.

(11) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is narrated from Abū Hamza al-Thumālī that he said: 'I heard one of the two of them , say that ʿAlī once asked the people, "Which verse in the Book of God is the most hopeful in your eyes?" Some of them replied, *Indeed Allah does not forgive that any partner should be ascribed to Him, but He forgives anything besides that to whomever He wishes*. He said, "It is good, but it is not the one I had in mind." Others said, *'O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah ...'* He said, "It is good, but it is not the one I had in mind." Yet others mentioned, *and those who, when they commit an indecent act or wrong themselves, remember Allah, and plead for forgiveness for their sins*. He said, "It is good, but it is not the one I had in mind."'

The narrator continued: 'Then the people fell silent. He asked, "What is the matter with you, O assembly of Muslims?" They responded,"'By God, we have nothing else." He replied, "I heard the Messenger of God say: The most hopeful verse in the Book of God is: *Maintain the prayer at the two ends of the day, and during the early hours of the night*. He recited the whole verse and said, 'O ʿAlī, by He who sent me with the truth as a giver of glad tidings and a warner—when one of you goes for his ablution, sins fall from

his limbs. When he turns his face and his heart to the prayer, he is as free from sins as he was when his mother gave birth to him. If something occurs between the prayers, it is the same until the five prayers are completed.'

He continued, 'O ʿAlī, the status of the five daily prayers for my community is like a flowing river at the doorstep of one of you. What would you think if a person had dirt on his body and bathed in that river five times a day? Would there be any dirt left on him? Similar to this, by God, are the five daily prayers are for my community!'"'

**Author's comment:** The analogy mentioned at the end of the narration has been reported through various Sunnī sources from several companions, including Abū Hurarra, Anas, Jābir, and Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī from him .

(12) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is narrated from Ibrāhīm al-Karkhī: 'I was with Abū ʿAbd Allāh (al-Ṣādiq) when a man from the people of Medina entered. Abū ʿAbd Allāh asked him, Where have you come from?' The man did not answer, so Abū ʿAbd Allāh said, 'You have come from here and there. Reflect on what you do in your day. An angel is assigned to you, recording what you do. Do not belittle a sin even if it seems small, for one day it will harm you. Also, do not belittle a good deed; nothing is more eagerly sought after than a good deed. It reaches even the oldest and greatest of sins, erasing them, and making them fall away and leaving you free from them. This is God's statement, *Indeed good deeds efface misdeeds. That is an admonition for the mindful.*'

(13) In the same source, it is narrated from Sumāʿa b. Mihrān: 'A man from the people of Jibāl (Western Iran) asked Abū ʿAbd Allāh about someone who acquired wealth through working for the ruler. He donates from it, maintains ties of kinship, and goes on pilgrimage hoping to be forgiven for what he earned, quoting the verse, *Indeed good deeds efface misdeeds*. Abū ʿAbd Allāh replied, "A sin does not atone for a sin. But a good deed can atone for a sin."

Then Abū ʿAbd Allāh said, "If lawful and forbidden are mixed together, becoming indistinguishable, and one cannot differentiate

between the lawful and the forbidden, then there is no problem."'

(14) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī reports from Aḥmad and al-Ṭabarānī, who transmit from Abū Umāma who said, 'The Messenger of God , stated: "There is no Muslim man who has a prescribed prayer to perform and stands to perform ablution, perfecting it, and then prays, perfecting his prayer, except that God forgives his sins between that prayer and the previous one."'

**Author's comment:** Narrations on this topic are numerous. Whoever wishes to carry out a detailed examination should refer to the compilations of traditions.

(15) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, it is narrated from al-Ṭabarānī, Abū al-Shaykh, Ibn Mardawayh, al-Daylamī, from Jarīr that: 'I heard the Messenger of God being asked about the explanation of this verse: *Your Lord would never destroy the townships unjustly while their inhabitants were bringing about reform* (11:117). The Messenger of God responded: "It means their people treated each other fairly."'

(16) In *al-Kāfī*, it is transmitted from 'Abd Allāh b. Sinān, who asked Imām al-Ṣādiq , about the verse: *Had your Lord wished, He would have made mankind one community; but they continue to differ, except those on whom your Lord has mercy* (11:118–119). He replied: "They were one community, and then God sent prophets to establish a conclusive proofs for them."'

**Author's comment:** A similar narration has been cited by al-Ṣadūq in *Maʿānī al-Akhbār*.

(17) In *Maʿānī al-Akhbār*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq transmits via his chain of narrators from Abū Baṣīr, that he asked Imām al-Ṣādiq about the verse, *I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me* (51:56). He said: 'God created them to command them to worship.' And he asked about the verse, *but they continue to differ, except those on whom your Lord has mercy—and that is why He created them* (11:118–119). He said: 'He created them to perform acts that make them deserving of His mercy, so He may have mercy on them.'

(18) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is narrated from Abū al-Jārūd, from Abū Jaʿfar : '*But they continue to differ, except those on whom your Lord has mercy*—it refers to the family of Muḥammad and their

followers. And as for the verse, *and that is why He created them*, it means that the people of mercy do not differ about religion.'

(19) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is narrated from Yaʿqūb b. Saʿīd, from Imām al-Ṣādiq , about the verse, *I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me* (51:56). He replied: 'God created them for worship.' And about the verse, *but they continue to differ, except those on whom your Lord has mercy—and that is why He created them*, he said: 'This verse was revealed after the former one.'

**Author's comment:** This points to the notion that the second verse, which says *except those on whom your Lord has mercy—and that is why He created them*, serves as a specific verse that abrogates the general meaning of the previous verse. It has been previously discussed in our treatment of abrogation that, according to the teachings of the Prophet's Household , the concept of abrogation is broader than what is conventionally understood by scholars of Islamic legal theory. The specific verses, in their formative essence, overrule the meaning of the general verses, as specific contexts and factors have a more direct effect than general stipulations. Understand this well.

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## Verses 120–123

The verses succinctly convey to the Prophet the central message of this chapter whose verses were revealed to him. They inform him that this chapter elucidates the truth about the origin and the return to God, as well as God's modus operandi in dealing with His servants. In relation to the Prophet , it serves as an instruction of true knowledge; for the believers, it is a reminder and an admonition; and for the disbelievers who are reluctant to embrace faith, it is a decisive argument. Therefore, God instructs the Prophet to say to them at the end of your debate: *And say to those who do not have faith, 'Act according to your ability; we too are acting. And wait! We too are waiting* for the fulfilment of what God has told us about His established decree in His creation: The felicity of the righteous and the misery of the corrupt.' The chapter concludes by commanding the Prophet to worship God and to place his trust in Him, for all matters return to Him.

وَكُلًّا نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الرُّسُلِ مَا نُثَبِّتُ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ ۚ وَجَاءَكَ فِي هَٰذِهِ الْحَقُّ وَمَوْعِظَةٌ وَذِكْرَىٰ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٢٠﴾

(11:120) Whatever We relate to you of the accounts of the messengers are those by which We strengthen your heart, and there has come to you in this the truth and an advice and admonition for the faithful.

This means that every narrative is detailed to you, whether in depth or in summary. The phrase, *the accounts of the messengers*, specifies what is encompassed by the general term, '*whatever*'. His words, *by which We strengthen your heart*, indicate the specific purpose of these narratives, pointing to the benefit of these stories for the Prophet , which is to fortify his heart and dispel any anxieties and worries he may have harboured.

The essence of this verse's meaning is as follows: 'The accounts of these messengers are conveyed to you so as to solidify your heart and to anchor your determination in the path of advocating truth, tearing out the roots of corruption, and enduring persecution at the hands of your people.'

God then highlights the benefits of the chapter that encompass both the Prophet , the community of believers, and the disbelievers. Regarding the benefit the Prophet receives from the revelation of the chapter, God says, *and there has come to you in this the truth*. The demonstrative pronoun '*this*' refers to the present chapter of the Qur'an, or to the verses revealed within it, or to the accounts of the messengers in some manner. At the same time, the coming of the truth in it relates to what God has expounded within the narratives and both before and after them. This encompasses the truths about the origin, the return to God, and God's modus operandi in sending messengers, spreading the divine call, then rewarding the believers in this life with salvation and in the hereafter with paradise, and punishing the wrongdoers with worldly consequences and eternal torment in the next.

Regarding the benefits that pertain to the believers, God says: *and an advice and admonition for the faithful*. This is because the truths mentioned in this chapter contain a reminder for the believers, reminding them of their innate knowledge concerning the origin, the return, and whatever pertains to them. And the stories and lessons therein serve as an admonition from which they can draw moral lessons.

وَقُلْ لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ اعْمَلُوا عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِكُمْ إِنَّا عَامِلُونَ ﴿١٢١﴾ وَانْتَظِرُوا إِنَّا مُنْتَظِرُونَ ﴿١٢٢﴾

(11:121-122) And say to those who do not have faith, 'Act according to your ability; we too are acting. And wait! We too are waiting.'

This pertains to the disbelievers. God commands His Prophet to conclude his arguments with them and decisively refute them after recounting these narratives by saying: 'If you do not believe and continue in your ways of idolatry and corruption, despite the reminders and lessons given to you, and if you do not acknowledge the accounts of past communities and God's unchanging decree concerning them, then continue in your current state and what you deem best for yourselves. We too are acting. Await the consequences of your actions as we too are waiting. You will soon recognise the truth of God's divine news and its falsehood.'

This statement is a decisive refutation and a kind of warning, which

God has included in the past stories, such as the tales of Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and in the account of Shuʿayb, , where God quotes him as saying: *O my people! Act according to your ability; I too am acting. Soon you will know who will be overtaken by a punishment that will disgrace him, and who is a liar. So be on the watch; I too will be watching along with you* (11:93).

وَلِلَّهِ غَيْبُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُ الْأَمْرُ كُلُّهُ فَاعْبُدْهُ وَتَوَكَّلْ
عَلَيْهِ ۚ وَمَا رَبُّكَ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

> (11:123) To Allah belongs the Unseen of the heavens and the earth, and to Him all matters are returned. So worship Him and trust in Him. Your Lord is not oblivious of what you do.

Given that God's command to His Prophet was to instruct the disbelievers to act as they please and to wait for the outcome, and informed them that both he and those who believed with him were also acting and waiting, it means that following His command to act and await. This is emphasized with two statements to reassure the Prophet and establish firmness in his heart, knowing that ultimately, events will turn in the Prophet's favor against the disbelievers.

Therefore, the meaning here is: 'Act and await, you and those who follow you. For the Unseen of the heavens and the earth, which encompasses the outcomes of both your and their affairs, is solely in the dominion of your Lord, who is God the Exalted, not in their deities that they associate with Him, nor in the means they rely upon to turn the tides in their favor and alter outcomes for their benefit. The entire affair returns to your Lord, who is God, revealing from the Unseen the outcomes as He wills and as He has foretold. Thus, things will turn in your favor against them. This is a wondrous form of exposition.

This shows the reason for replacing the repeated term '*your Lord*' in these verses with the name '*Allah*.' It imbues a sense of His encompassing everything, great and small, in a manner not found in any other term. The context requires reliance and refuge in an entity that no one else can hope to overpower or surpass, and that is God Almighty. Therefore, you will note that after this statement, the verse returns to using the descriptor previously and repeatedly used, '*your Lord*', in His statement: *Your Lord is not oblivious of what you do.*

*... So worship Him and trust in Him*—It is evident that this command follows logically from His statement: *and to Him all matters are returned*. This means, if the entire matter returns solely to Him and no one besides Him possesses or controls anything, then you should worship Him alone and take Him as the trustee in all affairs. Do not rely on any cause apart from Him, for they are merely causes by His decree and cannot operate independently of Him. To rely on any of them is ignorance. And your Lord is not unaware of what you do; thus, it is imperative to remain devoted in your worship of Him and reliance upon Him.

End of Chapter 11

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# Chapter 12

## Sūrah Yūsuf (Joseph)

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بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

*In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate*

### Verses 1-3

#### Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to expound God's guardianship over the servant who has sincerely dedicated his faith to Him and become so filled by His love that he seeks no substitute and never turns to anything besides God. God takes charge of his affairs, nurtures him with utmost care, brings him near, quenches his spiritual thirst from His nearmost source, chooses him exclusively for Himself, divinely grants him life even when all apparent causes appear to have resolved upon his destruction, elevates him even when circumstances seem to belittle him, and empowers him even when the vicissitudes of time seem to diminish his stature.

This is illustrated by God in this chapter through the narrative of Joseph. No other chapter in the entirety of the Qur'an provides a detailed account of any story from its beginning to its end like it does for the story of Joseph. Moreover, this chapter is exclusively dedicated to the story of Joseph, without any other narrative being included alongside it.

Joseph was a servant who was sincere and devoted in his worship, so God chose him exclusively and honored him with His might. Though circumstances conspired to degrade and belittle him, every time he was cast into peril, God saved him using the very means that seemed to drive him towards ruin: His brothers' jealousy led them to throw him into a pit, then they sold him for a meagre price which took him to Egypt, where he was brought into a house of power and prestige. The lady of the house

attempted to seduce him, and when unsuccessful, falsely accused him of impropriety before her husband. However, it wasn't long before she confessed his innocence in front of the women of the city. Nevertheless, she had accused him, which led to his imprisonment. This became the reason for his eventual proximity to the king. The blood-stained shirt his brothers brought to his father Jacob on the first day was the very reason for the loss of Jacob's eyesight. Yet, that same shirt, sent with his brothers from Egypt to Jacob at the end, was the reason for the restoration of his vision. And so on and so forth.

In sum, whenever any adverse circumstances befell Joseph or obstructed his path to perfection, God made that very obstacle the means of guiding him rightly and rendering him successful in his endeavours. God continuously transitioned him from one state to another until He granted him governance and kingship, made him one of the elect, taught him the interpretation of events, and completed His grace upon him, just as his father had promised him would be the case.

God begins the story of Joseph by mentioning the dream he saw in his early years while he was still in the care of his father. Dreams are often a sign of glad tidings, and God made real the blessings indicated in his dream by bestowing upon him a divine upbringing. This is God's way with His devoted ones, as He has said: *Look! The friends of Allah will indeed have no fear nor will they grieve. Those who have faith, and are Godwary. For them is good news in the life of this world and in the Hereafter. There is no altering the words of Allah. That is the great success* (10:62-64).

In God's statement after mentioning Joseph's dream and its interpretation by his father, *In Joseph and his brothers there are certainly signs for the seekers*, it hints that there were people who had asked the Prophet about this story. This supports the account that a group of Jews instructed the idolaters of Mecca to question the Prophet about the reason the children of Israel moved to Egypt when Jacob had been residing in the land of the Levant. Thus, this chapter was revealed.

Given this, the purpose is to detail the story of Joseph and the narrative of the family of Jacob. Through providing these details, however, God achieved a higher purpose still, namely illustrating His guardianship over His devoted servants, as evident from the beginning and the end of the chapter. The chapter is Meccan, as indicated by the context of its verses.

Some narrations from Ibn ʿAbbās state that four of its verses are Medinan; three at the beginning and the verse, *In Joseph and his brothers there are certainly signs for the seekers*, which aligns with the context presented.

## Commentary

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الر ۚ تِلْكَ آيَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ ﴿١﴾

(12:1) Alif, Lam, Ra. Those (tilka) are the signs of the Manifest Book (*al-kitāb al-mubīn*).

This verse employs the demonstrative pronoun *tilka* ('those'), which is usually used to refer to something far away, for emphasis and exaltation. It appears that the *Manifest Book* referred to is the Qur'an that people recite, which is clear in itself and elucidates other matters, encompassing divine knowledge and truths about the origin and the return to God.

The Book is described in this verse as *mubīn* ('manifest'), unlike in the beginning of the chapter of *Yunus*, where it is called *ḥakīm* ('wise'), because this chapter is revealed concerning the story of the family of Jacob and its explanation. It is possible that *the Manifest Book* might also refer to the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*).

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٢﴾

(12:2) Indeed We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an so that you may apply reason (*laʿalla-kum taʿqilūn*).

The pronoun '*it*' in '*Indeed We have sent it*' refers to the Book since it encompasses divine signs and true knowledge. Its being sent down as as '*an Arabic Qur'an*' indicates that it was presented in the medium of the Arabic language during its revelation. It is made into words that are recited, aligning with the Arabic language as it is commonly understood by the Arabs. As God stated elsewhere: *We have made it an Arabic Qur'an so that you may apply reason, and indeed it is with Us in the Mother Book surely sublime and wise* (43:3–4).

The phrase *laʿalla-kum taʿqilūn* ('so that you may apply reason') aims to broaden and generalize the address. The chapter begins by addressing the Prophet : *Those are the signs of the Manifest Book* ..., This theme continues,

as evident in the third verse: *We will recount to you the best of narratives in what We have revealed to you of this Qur'an, and indeed prior to it you were among those who are unaware.*

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is that We have clothed this Book, which contains the signs of God, in the garb of the Arabic language during its descent. It is adorned in its linguistic beauty so it can be readily understood by you and your people or nation. Had its revelation not been conveyed in familiar terms or had it not been made clear in Arabic, your people would not have grasped the secrets within its verses. Instead, its understanding would have been exclusive to you due to the specificity of its revelation and teaching to you.

This indicates that the exact words of the Qur'an, in terms of their revelation and their being in Arabic, play a role in revealing the secrets of its verses and the realities of knowledge. If God had revealed its meaning to the Prophet in his own words, as in the case of sacred narrations, or if it had been translated into another language, some of its clear secrets would have been concealed from people's minds and would not have been able to grasp these with their own understanding.

The special attention God gave to what He revealed of His Book in a clear language leaves no room for doubt for those who reflect upon His words. How can it be otherwise when He has classified its verses into clear verses and allegorical ones, with the clear ones being the foundation of the Book to which the allegorical ones refer? God says, " *It is He who has sent down to you the Book. Parts of it are definitive verses, which are the mother of the Book, while others are metaphorical.* (3:7). God also said, *We certainly know that they say, 'It is only a human that instructs him.' The language of him to whom they refer is non-Arabic, while this is a clear Arabic language* (16:103).

نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ أَحْسَنَ الْقَصَصِ بِمَا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنَ وَإِنْ كُنْتَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ لَمِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ ﴿٣﴾

(12:3) We will recount to you the best of narratives in what We have revealed to you of this Qur'an, and indeed prior to it you were among those who are unaware.

In his *al-Mufradrāt*, al-Rāghib writes:

> '*Qaṣaṣ* means to trace back or follow a track. For example, one might say, "I traced his footsteps" (*qaṣaṣtu athara-hu)*, "They retraced their steps" (*fa-rtaddā ʿalā āthārihimā qaṣaṣan*), or "He told his sister to follow him" (*qāla li-ukhti-hi qaṣṣī-hi*). Hence, *qaṣaṣ* refers to consecutive accounts or narratives. As God said, *This is indeed the true account* (3:62); *There is certainly a moral in their accounts* (12:111); *So when he came to him and recounted the story to him* (28:25) and *We will recount to you the best of narratives* (12:3).'

Therefore, *qiṣṣa* means a story, and *aḥsan al-qaṣaṣ* refers to the best narrative or account. It might sometimes be said that *qiṣaṣ* is a verbal noun whose meaning is 'retribution' (*iqtiṣāṣ*).

Therefore, if *qiṣaṣ* is a noun, then the story of Joseph is the best of narratives because it depicts the sincerity of monotheism in worship and expounds God's guardianship over His servant. It illustrates how God nurtures the servant, guiding him on the path of love, elevating him from the depths of humiliation to the pinnacle of honor, and moving him from the shadows of the well's confinement, the shackles of slavery, and the prison of retribution and revenge, to the throne of glory and the seat of kingship.

And if it is a verbal noun, then recounting his story in the manner that God did is the best of recounting, because it recounts a tale of love and passion in the most chaste and subtle manner possible.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'We recount to you the best of tales due to our revelation of this Qur'an to you, and prior to our recounting this story to you, you were surely unaware of it.'

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## Verses 4–6

The verses recount the vision seen by Joseph, which he recounted to his father Jacob. Jacob interpreted this vision for Joseph and advised him not to share it with his brothers. This vision was one of glad tidings: God provided Joseph with this spiritual sustenance to nurture him, guiding him on the path of divine stewardship (*wilāya*) and closeness to his Lord. This vision serves as the prologue to his story .

إِذْ قَالَ يُوسُفُ لِأَبِيهِ يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي رَأَيْتُ أَحَدَ عَشَرَ كَوْكَبًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ رَأَيْتُهُمْ لِي سَاجِدِينَ ۝٤

(12:4) When Joseph said to his father, 'Father! I saw eleven planets, and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrating themselves before me.'

Note that this verse does not mention Jacob by name. Instead, he is referred to as '*father*' to evoke the tenderness, compassion, and mercy that existed between them, as further indicated by the subsequent verse: *He said, 'My son, do not recount …'* and so on.

The phrases '*I saw*' and '*I saw them*' pertain to dreams and visions. They describe what one witnesses during sleep or in a trance-like state when one's external senses are dulled, as evidenced by the next verse, … *do not recount your dream to your brothers* …, and a later statement in the narrative: *Father! This is the fulfilment of my dream*.

The repeated mention of the vision is due to the distance between the phrase '*I saw*' and '*prostrating … before me*.' One upshot of this is that it emphasizes that he saw all of them collectively prostrating, not individually. The visions he experienced were of two distinct types: seeing the celestial bodies (the planets, the sun, and the moon) was a visual perception, while witnessing their prostration and their reverence towards him was a spiritual one.

God refers to the planets and the planets using the masculine plural form in the statement *I saw them prostrating themselves before me*, which

is usually reserved for rational entities, to emphasize that their prostration was out of knowledge and free will, just as one rational being might prostrate before another.

God initiated Joseph's story with this vision, which served as a prophecy. It symbolized the divine guardianship (*wilāya*) he would achieve and the unique distinction and wisdom God would bestow upon him, including the ability to interpret dreams and the completion of the divine grace upon him. God's nurturing of him began from here. The promise made to him in his vision remained ever-present throughout his life's journey. No matter what circumstance he encountered, whether it was adversity or calamity, he would recall this vision, manifesting God's care, grounding himself in patience, and relying on divine support.

This wisdom is reflected in the fact that God Almighty grants His chosen ones good news of the blessings they will receive, emphasizing their closeness to Him and their exalted status. This is evident in His saying: *Look! The friends of Allah will indeed have no fear nor will they grieve. Those who have faith, and are Godwary. For them is good news in the life of this world and in the Hereafter. There is no altering the words of Allah. That is the great success* (10:62-64).

قَالَ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تَقْصُصْ رُؤْيَاكَ عَلَىٰ إِخْوَتِكَ فَيَكِيدُوا لَكَ كَيْدًا ۖ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ ۝٥

(12:5) He said, 'My son, do not recount your dream to your brothers, lest they should devise schemes against you (*fa yakīdū la-ka kaydan*). Satan is indeed man's manifest enemy.'

Al-Rāghib notes in his *Mufradāt*:

> '*Kayd* ('scheme') denotes a kind of strategem (*iḥtiyāl*), which can either be morally praiseworthy or blameworthy, though it is more often used in the perjorative sense. This also applies to terms like 'luring into perdition' (*istidrāj*) and plot (*makr*).'

Notably, the term *kayd* can be used both intransitively and transitively.

This verse shows that when Jacob heard of the vision Joseph had, he became certain of its import: that God would take care of Joseph, elevate his status, seat him on the throne of dignity, and grant him a distinction among the descendants of Jacob. Concerned for Joseph's well-being, Jacob

feared that his other sons, being a strong group, might become envious upon hearing the dream—a vision that clearly portrays them, along with Jacob and his wife, all bowing down to Joseph. Such a vision could provoke their pride and lead them to devise a scheme against Joseph to prevent the dream from coming true.

Therefore, Jacob, addressing his son Joseph with affection, as indicated by his words '*My son*' using a diminutive term *bunayya*, he advised him against sharing his vision with his brothers before interpreting it for him or informing him about the divine honor that was destined for him. By enjoining his son to observe caution before sharing the good news revealed Jacob's deep love and concern for Joseph. He sensed the jealousy and animosity his other sons harboured against him.

Evidence of their growing envy and manifest hostility is in Jacob's warning: *do not recount your dream to your brothers, lest they should devise schemes against you*. He didn't just express fear of their plotting but directly linked the act of sharing the vision with the resultant scheme, further emphasizing its likelihood by stating, , *lest they should devise schemes against you*. He then reiterated this with the reasoning, "*Satan is indeed man's manifest enemy*. This means that their plotting had another separate reason which amplifies the root cause, which is their jealousy of Joseph. This reason is Satan, who is a manifest enemy to mankind, constantly trying to divert people from the path of righteousness and happiness. Satan tempts and misleads, turning people away from the straight path, causing discord between parents and children, siblings, and friends, always aiming to lead them astray.

Therefore, it appears that Jacob said to Joseph, 'O my son, do not relate your vision to your brothers, for they might become envious of you and feel resentment towards your matter, thereby plotting against you under the instigation and temptation of Satan, who has gained influence over their hearts and will not allow them to refrain from scheming against you. Indeed, Satan is a clear enemy to humankind.'

وَكَذَٰلِكَ يَجْتَبِيكَ رَبُّكَ وَيُعَلِّمُكَ مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ وَيُتِمُّ نِعْمَتَهُ
عَلَيْكَ وَعَلَىٰ آلِ يَعْقُوبَ كَمَا أَتَمَّهَا عَلَىٰ أَبَوَيْكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ
وَإِسْحَاقَ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٦﴾

> (12:6) 'That is how your Lord will choose you (*yajtabī-ka*), and teach you the interpretation of dreams, and complete His blessing upon you and upon the house of Jacob, just as He completed it earlier for your fathers, Abraham and Isaac. Your Lord is indeed all-knowing, all-wise.'

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The term *ijtibā'* ('to choose') derives from *jabāya*, which means 'to gather. 'For instance, one might say, 'I collected water in the basin' (*jabaytu al-mā' fī al-ḥawḍ*) when gathering it. Likewise, 'tax collection' (*jabāyat al-kharāj*) implies its accumulation. Hence, the term suggests the act of bringing together the components of something and keeping them safe from being scattered or dispersed. It indicates a movement from the collector towards what is being collected. When God chooses a servant from among His servants, it means He directs His mercy towards him, distinguishes him with grace and honor, consolidates his affairs, and protects him from straying onto the deceptive paths laid for him by Satan. God then sets him on the straight path, taking charge of his affairs and making him exclusively devoted to Him, as was revealed about Joseph, *He was indeed one of Our dedicated servants* (12:24).

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***... and teach you the interpretation*** (ta'wīl) ***of dreams*** (aḥādīth) ...— The term *ta'wīl* refers to the realization or actualization of a vision in external reality. It represents the reality which appears to the person who experiences the vision in a form that is appropriate to his perceptions and experiences. For instance, the prostration of Joseph's parents and his eleven brothers was depicted as eleven planets, the sun, and the moon prostrating before him. The discussion on the meaning of interpretation has been covered earlier in the explanation of another verse: *As for those in whose hearts is deviance, they pursue what is metaphorical in it, courting temptation and courting its interpretation* (3:7). The term *aḥādīth* is the plural of *ḥadīth* (lit. 'discourse') and might refer to dreams because they arise from the self's internal discourse. Just as a person imagines matters in a dream, a narrator relates matters to his audience when awake. A dream is a narration of sorts, hence some scholars of language have said that dreams are termed *aḥādīth* because they involve the telling of a story, as should be clear.

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Some scholars have said that dreams are termed *aḥādīth* because they arise from the discourse of an angel if they are truthful, or from the discourse of the devil if they are false. However, there are instances when

dreams are not influenced by either angels or devils, like when a dream is a mere reflection of a person's physical condition. For instance, if someone has a fever or feels unusually warm, they might dream of bathing in a pond or experiencing extreme heat. Conversely, feeling extremely cold might conjure dreams of winter or snowfall.

Some have argued against this by pointing out discrepancies with reality. For instance, Joseph's dream did not contain a discourse, neither did the dreams of his two prison mates or the dream of the King of Egypt. This counterargument seems to stem from confusion regarding the definition of *ḥadīth*. They mistook the claim that a dream is from the discourse of an angel or a devil to mean a verbal narration, but that is not the case. Instead, what's meant is that dreams present events or situations symbolically. Just as a speaker uses words to paint a picture, the mind presents scenarios. This is similar to a person contemplating an action or decision, which can be perceived as their mind 'narrating' or illustrating it to them. Overall, to consider dreams as 'discourses' is to see them as internal dialogues, whether divine, devilish, or personal in origin. More will be elaborated on this topic later.

However, from the account of Prophet Joseph as related in this chapter, it becomes evident that the 'discourses' God taught him to interpret are not limited to dream narratives. They encompass broader occurrences and events, whether they materialise in wakefulness or in sleep. These events have undeniable connections to fundamental truths and intended outcomes. With God's guidance, one can perceive these connections and thus understand the symbolism and truths behind these events.

Supporting this view, regarding dreams, are the accounts where God clarifies the interpretation of Joseph's dream, as well as Joseph's interpretation of his own dream, the dreams of his two prison mates, and the Pharaoh's dream. As for wakefulness, we see this in Joseph's ability to predict events in prison, as stated: *He said, 'Before the meals you are served come to you I will inform you of its interpretation. That is among things my Lord has taught me* (12:37). Furthermore, when Joseph was taken by his brothers and they decided to throw him into the well, God revealed to him, saying: *you will surely inform them about this affair of theirs while they are not aware* (12:15). This will be discussed further.

Regarding the statement, *... and complete His blessing* (ni'ma) *upon you*

*and upon the house of Jacob* ... al-Rāghib says in his *Mufradāt*:

> 'The word *niʿma* signifies a good state or condition. It's pattern of conjugation that it is a state in which a person finds themselves, akin to *jilsa* ('sitting') or *rikba* ('kneeling'). The word *naʿma* signifies indulgence (*tanaʿam*), and its pattern of conjugation is like the one-time occurrence of an action, similar to *darba* ('a strike') or *shatma* ('an insult'). *Niʿma* in the general sense, can be used for both little and great things.'
>
> 'The verb *inʿām* ('to bestow blessings') means to do good to another. It is only used when the one receiving is a rational being. For instance, one cannot say that someone bestowed blessings upon his horse. In the Qur'an, God says, *those whom You have blessed* ... (1:7), and *When you said to him whom Allah had blessed, and whom you (too) had blessed* ... (33:37).'
>
> '*Naʿīm* means "abundant blessings". As in the Qur'anic verse, *in the gardens of bliss* (56:12 and 37:42). *Tanaʿum* means to receive the blessings and comforts of life ... Examples from the Qur'an include, *whenever his Lord tests him and grants him honor and blesses him* (89:15). *Taʿām nāʿim* refers to pleasant food, and *jāriya nāʿima* means a graceful young woman.'

In the word *niʿma* itself, there is a hint of softness, goodness, and suitability. It seems derived from *naʿūma* ('softness'), which is the root of its meaning. It is used specifically for humans because they have intellects that can distinguish between what is beneficial and what is harmful, favoring the beneficial and enjoying it, unlike other beings who cannot discern what benefits them from what harms them. Wealth, children, and other such things might be a blessing for one person and a curse for another, or a blessing in one situation and a curse in another.

Thus, the Qur'an does not consider these divine gifts like wealth, status, spouses, children, and the like as a blessing (*niʿma*) for a person unless they lead them to felicity and are imbued with the essence of divine guardianship (*wilāya*) that brings humans closer to God. But if they lead to misery and fall under the guardianship of Satan, they are considered curses and not blessings. There are many such verses to this effect.

Indeed, when the blessings are attributed to God, they are a form of divine favor, grace, and mercy because He generously bestows good and

does not intend harm or evil in His gifts. He is compassionate, merciful, forgiving, and loving. As the Qur'an states, *If you enumerate Allah's blessings* (niʿmat Allāh)*, you will not be able to count them* (14:34) This verse addresses all people. Another verse states, *Leave Me with the deniers, the opulent* (ūlī al-niʿma)*, and give them a little respite* (73:11) Yet another says, *When distress befalls man, he supplicates Us. Then, when We grant him a blessing* (niʿma) *from Us, he says, 'I was given it by virtue of knowledge'* (39:49). Such blessings, when attributed to Him, are a form of divine favor, but they become a curse when attributed to the one who is ungrateful them. As the Qur'an says, *And when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you are grateful, I will surely enhance you, but if you are ungrateful, My punishment is indeed severe'* (14:7).

In summary, when a person is under the protection and guidance of God, all the means that sustain life and lead him towards felicity are considered divine blessings for him. However, if he is under the influence of Satan, everything can turn into curses, even if they are fundamentally blessings from God. This transformation occurs when they are ungratefully received.

Furthermore, if the means of life are insufficient and do not encompass all aspects of human flourishing, they are still considered blessings. For instance, someone who has been granted wealth but is deprived of safety and peace may not be able to fully enjoy that wealth as desired. On the other hand, if one possesses everything needed to achieve a happy life without any deficiencies, that is the epitome of being blessed.

***... and complete His blessing upon you and upon the house of Jacob—*** This means that God has bestowed upon you blessings that bring felicity to your lives. However, this completion of blessings is specific to you and the family of Jacob, which includes Jacob, his wife, and all his children, as was seen in a vision.

God made Joseph the main subject and the family of Jacob supplementary to him when He said, *upon you and upon the house of Jacob*. This is supported by the dream in which Joseph saw the celestial bodies prostrating to him, in which he saw the family of Jacob represented as the sun, the moon, and eleven planets, all bowing down to him.

Among the blessings that God completed for Joseph was granting him governance, prophecy, kingship, and honor in Egypt. Additionally, God

chose him specially and taught him the interpretation of dreams. For the family of Jacob, a significant blessing was the comforting sight of Joseph for his father Jacob, bringing him and his entire family from their pastoral life in the wilderness to the civilised land of Egypt.

*... just as He completed it earlier for your fathers, Abraham and Isaac*—This means similar to the blessings God previously bestowed upon Abraham and Isaac, who are your ancestors. He granted them the best of this world and the hereafter. The phrase '*earlier*' relates to '*He completed it*', implying the blessings were completed on your forefathers who came before you.

The phrase, '*Abraham and Isaac*', is either a permutation (*badal*) or explanatory clause (*'atf bayān*) for the phrase, '*your fathers*.' The significance of this construction is to underscore that God's blessings are a continuous legacy within Abraham's household, passed on through Isaac. God completed His favor on Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and all the descendants of Jacob.

Therefore, the verse means: 'As you saw in your vision, God will choose you for Himself, purifying you from any form of idolatry, ensuring that there's no part of you devoted to anyone but Him. He teaches you the interpretation of dreams, which are the significance of events witnessed in visions that occur during sleep or wakefulness. This blessing, which is divine guardianship, is consummated through your residence in Egypt and your reunion with your family, and bestowed sovereignty and honor He has bestowed upon you, your fathers, and your siblings. Your Lord does this because He is well-acquainted with His servants, fully aware of their circumstances, and wise in administering what they deserve. He is fully aware of your condition and what others warrant of His wrath.'

Reflecting on the meaning of this verse reveals:

First, that Jacob was also amongst those chosen by God, and He taught him the interpretation of dreams as well, as Jacob, in this verse, interprets Joseph's dream. He would not have spoken of it without certitude, and this knowledge could not have been mere conjecture, but rather must have been something that God taught him.

Even when God recounted Jacob's advice to his sons, *'My sons, do not enter by one gate, but enter by separate gates ...'* (12:67) He affirmed about Jacob, *Indeed he had the knowledge of what We had taught him, but most*

*people do not know* (12:68).

Similarly, when Joseph in prison informed his fellow inmates that, *'Before the meals you are served come to you I will inform you of its interpretation. That is among things my Lord has taught me ...'* (12:37), he indicated that this was part of his knowledge of the interpretation of dreams that God had taught him. He then justified this knowledge by saying, *Indeed I renounce the creed of the people who have no faith in Allah and who disbelieve in the Hereafter. I follow the creed of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is not for us to ascribe any partner to Allah*' (12:37–38). This affirms that he, like his forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, devoted himself exclusively to God, with a heart purified from any form of setting up others as partners besides God. Thus, God taught him the interpretation of dreams. The fact that a common rationale is given for all of the prophets together, as should be clear, indicates that Joseph's forefathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—were similarly devoted to God and were taught the interpretation of dreams. This is further supported by another verse, *And remember Our servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, men of strength and insight. Indeed We purified them with the exclusiveness of the remembrance of the abode* (38:45–46). This suggests that knowledge of the interpretation of dreams is the result of one's exclusive devotion to God Almighty.

Second, all that Jacob relayed aligns precisely with what Joseph saw in his vision, namely the prostration of the sun, the moon, and eleven planets to him. Their prostration, which included Jacob—who is amongst the sincere ones who prostrate only to God—indicates that they prostrated in front of Joseph for God. They regarded Joseph similar to the Kaʿba, to which one prostrates, but the ultimate intention is always to worship God Almighty alone. Joseph possessed nothing and sought nothing but God. This reflects the essence of a servant's sincere devotion solely to his Lord, not associating any partners with Him. This idea is echoed in Joseph's statement: '*It is not for us to ascribe any partner to Allah*.' We have already discussed that the knowledge of dream interpretation stems from sincere devotion to God.

From this perspective, Jacob begins to interpret Joseph's dream by saying, '*That is ...*'—meaning 'as you saw yourself being prostrated to'—'*how your Lord will choose you*'—meaning 'He will purify you for Himself'—'*and teach you the interpretation of dreams*.'

Likewise, Joseph's vision of the house of Jacob in the form of the sun, the moon, and eleven 'planets' (*kawākib*), which are celestial bodies elevated in position, radiant in light, and vast in orbits, signifies that their status will rise, and they will ascend and flourish in their human existence. This existence, both religiously vibrant in this world and the hereafter, distinguishes them from all others.

Following on from this, Jacob said, '*and complete His blessing upon you'*—meaning you alone, as distinct from others, just as you saw yourself—'*and upon the house of Jacob*'—meaning: 'Upon me, upon my wife, and upon all your siblings, as you saw us united with similar features'—*'just as He completed it earlier for your fathers, Abraham and Isaac. Your Lord is indeed all-knowing, all-wise*.'

Third, the intention behind '*complete His blessing*' is to couple divine guardianship with elevating all aspects of a felicitous human life and combining the blessings of worldly life with those of the Hereafter. There's no contradiction in completing the blessings of all, while uniquely choosing Jacob and Joseph from among them for the interpretation of dreams. For the blessing, which is divine guardianship (*wilāya*), can vary in its degrees and levels. Insofar as this can be attributed to all, each individual receives their share.

However, it is possible to attribute a matter to a group based on its encompassing certain components, where some of them fulfil the meaning of that quality, as illustrated in the verse, *Certainly We gave the Children of Israel the Book, judgement and prophethood and We provided them with all the good things* (45:16). Being endowed with scripture, wisdom, and prophecy is specific to some of them but not all, unlike being provided for out of all good things.

Fourth, Joseph was the means by which God completed His blessings upon the house of Jacob. This is why Jacob placed Joseph at the forefront of his discourse and highlighted him above all others. He distinguished Joseph from among his family by saying: '*and complete His blessing upon you and upon the house of Jacob.*'

This is also why Jacob attributed this special care and mercy to God, mentioning time and again: '*your Lord*.' Note that he did not say, 'God will choose you', nor did he say, 'God is indeed all-knowing and all-wise.' All of this indicates that Joseph was at the forefront of God's completion

of His blessings upon the house of Jacob. Furthermore, the way that God invokes his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, the phrasing, '*just as He completed it earlier for your fathers, Abraham and Isaac*', removes them from being the principal focus in comparison to Joseph.

## Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, we read: 'In a narration from Abū al-Jārūd, from Abū Ja'far : "The interpretation of this dream is that Joseph would come to rule Egypt, and his parents and brothers would come to him. The sun represents Joseph's mother, Rachel, the moon represents Jacob, and the eleven planets symbolise his brothers. When they entered Joseph's presence, they prostrated in gratitude to God alone upon seeing him, and this prostration was for God."'

(2) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cites Ibn al-Mundhir, who narrates from Ibn 'Abbās regarding the verse, '... *eleven planets, and the sun and the moon ...*': '*Eleven planets* refers to his brothers, *the sun* represents his mother, and *the moon* symbolizes his father. Joseph's mother, Rachel, was famous for her beauty.'

**Author's comment:** Both narrations, as you can see, interpret the sun as his mother and the moon as his father. However, neither narration is without its weaknesses. There is also a report suggesting that the woman who entered Egypt with him was his aunt, not his mother, as his mother had passed away before that. This is also mentioned in the Torah.[1]

(3) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is narrated from Imām al-Bāqir : 'Joseph had eleven brothers, and from his mother, he had one brother named Benjamin. Joseph had this vision when he was nine years old, and he related it to his father, who responded: "'*My son, do not recount your dream ...*"'

**Author's comment:** According to some traditions, he was seven years old at the time of the vision. In the Torah, he is described as being sixteen years old.[2] However, the latter seems improbable.

1 Translator's note: See Genesis 46:27, which does not mention Jacob's wife coming to Egypt with the rest of his house.

2 Translator's note: See Genesis 37:1–11, which says he told his brothers of his dream at 17 years of age. However, note also that in the Torah's version, Jacob

There are other narrations concerning the vision, some of which will be discussed later in the chapter.

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rebukes Joseph for his dream: 'And he told it to his father, and to his brethren; and his father rebuked him, and said unto him: 'What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down to thee to the earth?''

## Verses 7–21

The Qur'anic account of Joseph begins after mentioning the glad tidings, which serve as a poignant introduction, alluding to the ultimate goal at which the story culminates. The present section of verses encompasses the first part of the narrative, in which Joseph departs from Jacob , leaving his father's house to reside in the house of Potiphar in Egypt. In the course of this part of the story, Joseph's brothers cast him into a well to be rid of him. A passing caravan subsequently extracted him from it, and his brothers sold him to the members of the caravan. The caravan then transported him to Egypt, where they sold him to Potiphar, where he remained.

لَقَدْ كَانَ فِي يُوسُفَ وَإِخْوَتِهِ آيَاتٌ لِلسَّائِلِينَ ۝٧

(12:7) In Joseph and his brothers there are certainly signs for the seekers

This verse introduces the story and underscores that it contains divine signs pointing towards God's oneness. It demonstrates that God is the guardian, overseeing the affairs of His devoted servants, elevating them to positions of honor and firmly establishing them on thrones of virtue. God is supreme in His decree, orchestrating causes as He wills, not as others wish, deriving outcomes from them as He desires, and not necessarily in accordance with what outwardly seems probable.

Joseph's brothers schemed against him out of envy, cast him into the dark depths of a well, and later sold him to a caravan as a slave, intending to lead him to his ruin. Yet, through the very means they thought would cause his destruction, God gave him life. When they sought to humiliate him, God honored him through the very avenue of that intended humiliation. They aimed to detract from their father's love for him, but God reversed the situation. They deprived their father of sight by presenting him with Joseph's blood-stained shirt, but God restored his vision using the very shirt brought by the bearer of good news.

Throughout this story, whenever harm approached Joseph, God shielded him, demonstrating His might and revealing Joseph's grace. Every

time he was set on a path leading to potential ruin or misfortune, God, through that very path, guided him to a favorable outcome and an evident honorable position. It is to this that God alludes when He has Joseph reveal his identity to his brothers, saying: '*He said, 'I am Joseph, and this is my brother. Certainly Allah has shown us favor. Indeed if one is Godwary and patient Allah does not waste the reward of the virtuous'* (12:90). Later, in the presence of his brothers, he said to his father: *'Father! This is the fulfilment of my dream of long ago, which my Lord has made come true. He was certainly gracious to me when He brought me out of the prison and brought you over from the desert after that Satan had incited ill feeling between me and my brothers*' (12:100). Joseph's spiritual inclination led him to turn wholly toward his Lord, distancing himself from all else, as he said: *'My Lord! You have granted me a share in the kingdom, and taught me the interpretation of dreams. Originator of the heavens and earth! You are my guardian in this world and the Hereafter!*' (12:101).

The phrase, ... *for the seekers* (li al-sā'ilīn, lit. 'those who ask'), indicates that there was a group of people who asked the Prophet about the story or related matters, and that this is what led to the revelation of this chapter.

إِذْ قَالُوا لَيُوسُفُ وَأَخُوهُ أَحَبُّ إِلَىٰ أَبِينَا مِنَّا وَنَحْنُ عُصْبَةٌ إِنَّ أَبَانَا لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٨﴾

(12:8) When they said, 'Surely Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than us, though we are a hardy group (*'uṣba*). Our father is indeed in manifest error.'

According to al-Ṭabrisī, writing in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, the term *'uṣba* ('hardy group') refers to a group of people who are bonded closely with one another, typically ranging from ten to fifteen members, though some state it's between ten to forty. The term does not have a singular form, similar to the other Arabic words *qawm* ('people') or *raht* ('band').

***When they said, 'Surely Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than us ...'***—The speakers in this verse are Jacob's sons, excluding Joseph and his brother whom they mention. There were ten of them, strong men who took charge of managing their father, Jacob's household, overseeing his livestock, and handling his wealth, as indicated by their statement, '*we are a hardy group*.'

When they say, '*Joseph and his brother*', they specifically associate the brother with Joseph, despite all of them being sons of Jacob and brothers among themselves. This implies that Joseph and his brother were siblings from the same mother and only half-brothers to the rest through their father. Narrations mention that the name of Joseph's brother was Benjamin. The context suggests that both were young and, as such, had not yet become involved in the management of Jacob's household or handling his livestock and wealth.

Their claim, '*we are a hardy group*', translates to them being ten strong men, each complementing the strength of one another. This statement, following the previous one, illustrates the cause of their jealousy and resentment towards Joseph and Benjamin, and their anger towards their father, Jacob, for his apparent favoritism. It essentially serves as a justification for their subsequent assertion, '*Our father is indeed in manifest error*.'

When Joseph's brothers say, '*Our father is indeed in manifest error* (fī ḍalāl mubīn)', they criticize their father for what they see as a lapse in judgement. By *ḍalāl*, they mean a misalignment of his priorities and incorrect behavior, rather than misguidance in matters of religion.

First of all, this judgement arises because they believe that they are a group of strong brothers who manage their father's essential affairs, maintain his livelihood, and fend off any threats. By contrast, Joseph and his brother were young children, inexperienced in life's challenges. Therefore, they considered their father's deep affection for the two brothers and his consistent engagement with them at the expense of the others as incorrect. Wise living, they believed, required a person to invest in every available resource according to its importance. To them, the fact that Jacob focused solely on the two younger children, who were unable to contribute to their collective living in any significant way, while simultaneously neglecting those who hold the keys to his livelihood, deviates from the path of good sense.

Second, they acknowledged their belief in God and recognized the prophethood of their father, Jacob. This is evident from their statements, '*and that you may become a righteous lot after that*' (12:9), and later on, *'Father! Plead for forgiveness of our sins!'* (12:97). This is also evident in their final words to Joseph, *By Allah, Allah has certainly preferred you over us, and we have indeed been erring* (12:91). If they had meant by their

statement, '*Our father is indeed in manifest error*', that Jacob was religiously misguided, that would imply disbelief on their part. Yet, in spite of everything else, they genuinely loved their father, respected him, and revered him. They acted against Joseph that they might win their father's undivided affection, as they said, *'Kill Joseph or cast him away into some land, so that your father's love may be exclusively yours ...'* (12:9). Their actions suggest they desired their father's exclusive love. Had it been otherwise, they would naturally have first acted against their father instead of targeting Joseph, perhaps killing or isolating Jacob to ensure their dominion, as dealing with Joseph would have been comparatively easier with their father out of the picture.

Certainly, they confronted their father with such statements when he said to them, *As the caravan set off, their father said, 'I sense the scent of Joseph, if you will not consider me a dotard.' They said, 'By God, you persist in your inveterate error'* (12:94–95). But it is evident that the error mentioned here does not pertain to religious deviation, but rather to Jacob's overwhelming affection for Joseph, which they thought was excessive.

The context of this verse and related verses indicate that Jacob lived among the nomads. He had twelve sons; they were strong and capable, ten of whom were older in age. These ten formed a powerful group and managed the affairs of their father's wealth and livestock. Two of them were younger and were from the same mother, being in their father's care, namely Joseph and his brother. Jacob had a deep affection for these two, not out of mere emotional attachment, but because he perceived in them signs of righteousness and virtue in them.

Jacob was a devoted servant of God, praised as indicated by the verse, "*Indeed We purified them with the exclusiveness of the remembrance of the abode* (38:46). This characteristic has been alluded to earlier.

This apparent favoritism towards Joseph and Benjamin aroused the envy of the elder brothers towards the two younger ones. Jacob was aware of this envy, and his love, especially for Joseph, was evident. He was protective of Joseph, always wary of leaving him alone with his brothers, fearing they might harm him. This, in turn, only intensified their jealousy and resentment towards Joseph. Jacob started noticing malicious intent in their actions and plans, especially after Joseph shared his dream with him, which increased Jacob's concern and affection for him. He advised Joseph

not to share his dream with his brothers, hoping to protect him from their potential plots. Yet, destiny took its course.

The elder sons of Jacob gathered and discussed among themselves their father's behavior and his preferential treatment of Joseph and his brother Benjamin. They noticed that despite them being young and relatively incapable, their father's attention was mostly on them, neglecting the elder sons who were actually the main pillars of his life, the main force in warding off adversities, procuring his livelihood, and handling his wealth and livestock. They believed that it wasn't wise or fair of him to prioritize the two younger ones over the older, stronger group. Thus, they criticized their father's approach and concluded that he was clearly misguided in this regard.

They did not intend, when accusing their father of being misguided, to imply religious misguidance, which would be tantamount to disbelief. Rather, they referred to his social demeanor, as evidenced by the related verses mentioned earlier.

This highlights the various errors in different scholars' explanations of the verse's meaning:

Some of them have argued that their deeming their father to have gone astray from the path of justice and equality was due to their own blatant ignorance and a grave mistake on their part. This might be attributed to what they perceived to be their father's excessive affection towards the mother of Joseph and Benjamin's mother, who was different from their own. This implies that the primary point of contention arose from the plurality of mothers due to polygamous marriage, especially with servant wives.[1] This is what led them to mistake the extra affection that parents naturally bestow on their youngest and weakest offspring, and Joseph and his brother were the youngest of Jacob's children.

According to this view, the moral of this story is that parents ought to treat their children with fairness and foster love and equity amongst them. They should prevent envy and animosity from arising between siblings.

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1 This alludes to the account in the Torah where Jacob had twelve sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun were from Leah, his cousin; Joseph and Benjamin were from Rachel, his other cousin; Dan and Naphtali were from Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid; and Gad and Asher were from Zilpah, Leah's handmaid.

Favoritism, which those who are not favorites might view as a source of humiliation for them and undue preference for their sibling, is discouraged. Prophet Muhammad , strictly warned against this. Instead, the path of wisdom should be followed by recognizing and nurturing God-given innate talents such as noble character, piety, knowledge, and intelligence.

Of course, Jacob was well aware of this. He advised Joseph against revealing his dream to his siblings precisely because he knew the implications. Yet, how can a person resist the innate feelings of their heart and spirit? Can one truly prevent their deep emotions from influencing their actions? Certainly not.

Furthermore, the statement implying that Jacob's love for Joseph was merely instinctual affection due to their young age, as observed among fathers towards their youngest offspring, only holds true when they are young. Once they grow up, this affection naturally shifts to those who are younger.

Regarding the assertion that the root of their jealousy and animosity stemmed from the differences in their mothers, especially the servant wives, it is acknowledged that differences in maternal lineage can affect the relationship among siblings. This cannot be denied, and it is something plausible in many scenarios. However, the reason mentioned in the Qur'an is different. Had this been the sole reason, they would have treated Joseph's brother the same way they treated Joseph, and not been content otherwise, but they did not do this.

Now let us turn to the claim that the extra love and affection that parents typically reserve for the youngest of their children, and which prevents them from challenging or opposing them, became a point of contention for Joseph's older siblings. In other words, they see the increased attention parents give to their younger and weaker siblings and object that this is neither fair nor equal, the parents' response typically is that the younger ones are fragile and require extra care, compassion, and assistance until they are capable of standing on their own two feet. The older siblings, in most cases, accept this explanation and cease their objections, finding it convincing.

Therefore, had Jacob's love for Joseph and his brother been merely a manifestation of this tenderness and compassion due to their young age—a sentiment all can recognise and remember receiving from their own parents in their youth—the older brothers wouldn't have found fault or criticized

their father for it. Their statement, *though we are a hardy group*, would then have reflected their misconception about their father's supposed bias, not necessarily proving their father's excessive love for the younger ones.

They even said to their father in relation to Joseph, *'Father! Why is it that you do not trust us with Joseph? We are indeed his well-wishers.'* It is known that Jacob's honoring of Joseph, keeping him close, and his protective attitude over him went beyond just love, tenderness, and compassion arising out of his youth and vulnerability.

Now let us turn to the claim that Jacob was well aware of their jealousy and resentment of Joseph, it implies that Jacob's affection for his son distracted him from his duty of raising all his children justly. He knew that such favoritism would go against justice and fairness, and that it might lead to trouble between his children. However, he is excused because it's nearly impossible for humans to go against the deep emotions of their hearts and the bonds of their souls.

This view utterly undermines established rational and scriptural foundations from which the virtues and spiritual stations of prophets, scholars, the truthful, the martyrs, the righteous, and the basis for noble character are derived. By nature, humans have an inherent capacity for moral development and the eradication of base qualities. The essence of these base qualities is the pursuit of personal desires, and the way to remove them from one's character is by prioritizing God's pleasure over all else. This is what we expect from every individual who engages in moral and spiritual self-development among the pious and devout. How, then, can we expect less from the prophets, especially someone like Jacob?

One wonders: If humans are incapable of opposing their innermost desires in matters like these, then what is the meaning of the myriad commandments and prohibitions in the faith related to these issues? Would they not be rendered pointless were this the case?

The view propounded above depreciates the spiritual station of God's prophets and His saints, and brings them down to the level of the average people who follow their base desires and are ignorant of the position of their Lord. However, it is well-known that God has described His prophets in a manner completely contrary to this. For example, see His saying: *We chose them and guided them to a straight path* (6:87). He mentioned Jacob, his fathers Abraham and Isaac , saying: *and each of them We made*

*righteous. We made them leaders, guiding by Our command, and We revealed to them the performance of good deeds, the maintenance of prayers, and the giving of zakat, and they used to worship Us* (21:73). He has also said, *Indeed We purified them with the exclusiveness of the remembrance of the abode* (38:46).

God informs us that He has guided these prophets to His straight path unconditionally, and that He chose them, assembled them, and made them exclusively for Himself. They are sincerely devoted to God, sharing this devotion with no other. They only seek what He deems right, prioritizing His pleasure over all others, whether it's their own desires or someone else's. God frequently mentions in His scripture Satan's intent to mislead all of Adam's progeny, except the sincere ones: *By Your might, I will surely pervert them, except Your exclusive servants among them* (38:83).

The truth is that Jacob loved Joseph and his brother for the sake of God due to the piety and spiritual perfection that he perceived in them. Especially in Joseph, his dream indicated that God would choose him, teach him the interpretation of visions, and complete His favor upon him and upon the family of Jacob. This love was not based on mere desires at all.

Some argue, based on the brothers' statement, *Our father is indeed in manifest error* (12:5), that by this they meant that their father had gone astray in matters of religion. However, the context of the verses in question refutes this.

In stark contrast to this perspective is the view of others, suggesting that Joseph's brothers were themselves prophets. They accuse their father of deviating in his behavior and of being unfair. When confronted with their own wrongdoing and injustice towards their brother and father, proponents of this view justify it by saying it was a minor sin committed before the onset of prophethood or it is acceptable given the possibility of minor sins from prophets before their prophethood. Others may argue they were merely young teenagers at the time, suggesting such behaviors are to be expected from adolescents. However, these are mere speculations. And God's statement, *We have indeed revealed to you as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him, and We revealed to Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes …* (4:163), does not contain the slightest suggestion that any of Joseph's brothers were prophets in their own right.

The truth is that Joseph's brothers were not prophets, but rather

children of prophets. They were envious of Joseph and committed a sin by wronging him. However, they later repented to their Lord and mended their ways. Furthermore, both Jacob and Joseph , sought forgiveness for them from God. This is alluded to in God's mentioning their father's statement: '*I shall plead with my Lord to forgive you*' (12:98) following their plea, '*Father! Plead for forgiveness of our sins! We have indeed been erring*', and also in Joseph's statement: '*Allah will forgive you, and He is the most merciful of the merciful*' (12:92) after they admitted, '*... and we have indeed been erring*' (!2:91)

Some argue that Joseph's brothers only became envious of him after he shared his dream with them. However, Jacob had warned Joseph not to share his dream with his brothers because of their pre-existing envy and resentment towards him. The truth is, the dream only intensified their envy, which had existed even before he shared the dream, as has been previously explained.

اقْتُلُوا يُوسُفَ أَوِ اطْرَحُوهُ أَرْضًا يَخْلُ لَكُمْ وَجْهُ أَبِيكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ قَوْمًا صَالِحِينَ ﴿٩﴾

(12:9) 'Kill Joseph or cast him away into some land, so that your father's love may be exclusively yours, and that you may become a righteous lot after that.'

This is a continuation of Joseph's brothers' conversation. This verse marks the second phase of their plot against him during their secret meeting. Their plan aimed to ease their hearts of their resentment towards him, as God mentioned, *... and you were not with them when they conspired together and schemed* (12:102).

God recounts the essence of their plot in these verses: *When they said, 'Surely Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than us, though we are a hardy group. Our father is indeed in manifest error.' 'Kill Joseph or cast him away into some land, so that your father's love may be exclusively yours, and that you may become a righteous lot after that'* (12:8-9).

First of all, they mention their grievances against Joseph and his brother, namely that the two brothers had diverted their father's attention and affection away from the others, drawing him exclusively towards themselves. This made Jacob more devoted to the two of them, while

neglecting the rest. This situation presented them with a dilemma, indicating a looming threat to their future position and a waste of their present efforts, potentially leading to a loss of status and strength. They perceived this as Jacob's '*error*' in his behavior and approach.

Then, in their quest to eliminate the problem, they discussed various potential solutions. Each one proposed what they thought was the best course of action. Some suggested that Joseph should be killed, while others proposed abandoning him in a distant land where he wouldn't be able to return to his father and family, thus erasing his memory and removing his presence. This, they believed, would free their father's attention for them alone, and his love and affection would be exclusively theirs.

Subsequently, they came to an agreement that closely resembled the second suggestion, which was to cast him into the depths of a well. Their hope was that a passing caravan would find and take him to a distant, remote land. In doing this, they believed, all word of him would be lost and all trace of him obliterated.

The statement, '*Kill Joseph ...*' reflects one of the options proposed to deal with him. When they initially discussed their conspiracy, they mentioned both Joseph and his brother: '*Surely Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than us ...*' Therefore, this proposition highlights that Joseph in particular was the recipient of Jacob's affection and the focal point of his care and attention. Although his brother was also cherished and loved among them. And how could it be otherwise? After all, it was Joseph who had the prophetic dream, heralding special divine blessings and spiritual distinctions for him. Moreover, he was the elder of the two, and the perceived danger posed by him towards the elder brothers was more imminent than that from his younger brother. Perhaps the mention of both brothers also hints at Jacob's love for their mother, which naturally extended to them and further exacerbated the envy, anger, and malice of the other brothers toward them.

The statement, '*... or cast him away into some land*' depicts their second option proposed for dealing with Joseph. The idea was to either send him away or exile him to a place from whence he would be unable to return to his father's home. In this way, he would effectively be as good as dead; his presence and influence would disappear, and they would be relieved of the threat he posed, akin to dropping him into a well or sending him to a

remote place. The implication of casting someone to '*some land*' (notice that this is left indefinite) and the choice of the word 'cast' (*ṭarḥ*) suggests discarding a person or an object deemed unnecessary or worthless.

The fact that both opinions are presented as options suggests that the majority of the brothers were inclined to accept either one of them, until one among them said, '*Do not kill Joseph ...*'

The phrase, *so that your father's love may be exclusively yours* (lit. 'so that your father's countenance might be yours alone') means to carry out one of the two aforementioned actions so that their father's undivided affection would be theirs. This is a metaphorical way of expressing the exclusive devotion of their father's love once the obstacle, Joseph, who monopolized their father's attention and affection, was removed. The brothers felt that when both they and Joseph were with their father, Joseph stood as a barrier between them and their father, drawing away his attention. Once Joseph was removed, their father's affection would be exclusively for them, and his attention would be confined solely to them.

*... and that you may become a righteous lot after that*—This means that after they had dealt with Joseph—whether by murder or exile (both interpretations are plausible)—they intended to become righteous by repenting for this sin. This indicates that they viewed their act as sinful, and although they respected religious matters and held them sacred, their envy and resentment overcame them. They were tempted by their desires to do this wrong deed, falsely believing that they could evade divine punishment by committing the sin and then repenting afterward. This reflects ignorance because such a premeditated act of sin followed by repentance is not genuinely accepted. If someone intentionally commits a sin with the prior intention of repenting afterward, they are not truly seeking to return to God. Instead, they are merely trying to avoid the promised punishment while still disobeying His command. This type of repentance, which follows a premeditated act of sin, is really an extension of the original sinful intent. It is not a genuine penance to God with remorse for the wrongful act. The meaning and nature of repentance has been previously discussed in our explanation of God's saying, *repentance by Allah is only for those who commit evil out of ignorance ...* (4:17).

Some say that the righteousness referred to in the verse actually refers to the proper ordering of worldly affairs, meaning they would prosper in

their relationship with their father after Joseph's departure.

قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِنْهُمْ لَا تَقْتُلُوا يُوسُفَ وَأَلْقُوهُ فِي غَيَابَتِ الْجُبِّ يَلْتَقِطْهُ بَعْضُ السَّيَّارَةِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ فَاعِلِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

(12:10) One of them said, 'Do not kill Joseph, but throw him into the recess (*ghayāb*) of the well (*al-jubb*) so that some caravan may pick him up, if you are to do anything.'

The term *jubb* here denotes a well that is not lined with stones; if it were lined, it would be called a *bi'r*. The *ghayāb* ('recess') refers to the part of the well that is unseen and hidden because of its darkness.

The one who proposed this idea advocated for the second opinion mentioned in the previous verse, which is indicated by '*or cast him away into some land*.' However, he specified it in a way that would not result in Joseph's death, such as leaving him in a well to possibly die of hunger or similar fate. His proposal was to remove Joseph from their land without directly causing his death or any harm similar to death. Therefore, this shows some degree of compassion. The idea was to throw him into one of the wells on the route of passing travellers. When they drew water, they would find him, rescue him, and take him to a distant land, thus severing his ties with his family. The narrative suggests that they accepted this opinion as no objection was mentioned, and their subsequent actions, as described in the following verses, align with this decision.

Commentators have disagreed regarding the name of the individual who spoke after it was definitively stated that he was one of Joseph's brothers. The Qur'an states, *One of them said* ... Some argue that it was Reuben, Joseph's maternal cousin; others say it was Judah, who was among the oldest and wisest; and yet others believe it was Levi. However, we need not delve into this debate since the Qur'an does not specify his name, and identifying the speaker here does not yield a significant benefit to our comprehension of the story.

Some scholars note that the specific mention of '*the well*' with the definite article (*al-*) indicates that it was a well that was known to all of them. This reading is valid unless the definite article is understood here to signify a category or type. Moreover, there is a difference of opinion about the exact location of this well. However, as with the name of the speaker,

there is also no substantial benefit in exploring these differing views.

قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا مَا لَكَ لَا تَأْمَنَّا عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَنَاصِحُونَ ﴿١١﴾

**(12:11) They said, 'Father! Why is it that you do not trust us with Joseph? We are indeed his well-wishers.'**

This verse indicates that all of Joseph's brothers decided unanimously not to kill him but rather to throw him into the depths of the well. They all agreed to deceive their father to take Joseph away and carry out their plan. Knowing their father's inherent distrust in leaving Joseph with them, it was necessary for them to reassure their father and remove any doubt from his heart about their intentions towards their younger brother. It was imperative for them to take Joseph away. Hence, they approached their father saying, '*Father!*' evoking his compassion and emphasizing their affection for him. They continued, '*Why is it that you do not trust us with Joseph? We are indeed his well-wishers*', meaning they only wished good for Joseph and sought his happiness.

They then voiced their request, which was for their father to send Joseph with them to their grazing grounds, where they tended to their flocks. There, Joseph could enjoy himself, and they assured they would watch over him, saying, '*Let him go with us tomorrow so that he may eat lots of fruits and play, and we will indeed take care of him*.'

أَرْسِلْهُ مَعَنَا غَدًا يَرْتَعْ وَيَلْعَبْ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

**(12:12) 'Let him go with us tomorrow so that he may eat lots of fruits and play, and we will indeed take care of him.'**

This describes leisurely activities: Animals grazing, humans relaxing and enjoying fruits and such.

Their proposal, '*Let him go with us tomorrow so that he may eat lots of fruits and play ...*' reiterates their initial suggestion. Their declaration, '*...and we will indeed take care of him* (innā la-hu la-ḥāfiẓūn)' emphasizes their commitment to look after their younger brother. Note that they use several means of affirmation in Arabic to stress their sincerity: The particle *innā*, the *lām* of emphasis, and a nominal sentence. This phrase is analogous in form to their previous statement, '*We are indeed his well-wishers*.'

It is as if they said to their father: 'Why don't you trust us with Joseph? If you fear we might harm him, know that we sincerely care for him. And if you fear harm from others or any external threat, we assure you, we are his best protectors from harm.

The dialogue is arranged in a natural sequence: they first assured that he would always be safe with them, then they requested to take him with them the next day, and subsequently, they emphasized that they would be watchful over him. Their statement, '*We are indeed his well-wishers*' provides a continual assurance from their side, while their guarantee, '*we will indeed take care of him*' affirms their protection of him against external threats.

قَالَ إِنِّي لَيَحْزُنُنِي أَنْ تَذْهَبُوا بِهِ وَأَخَافُ أَنْ يَأْكُلَهُ الذِّئْبُ وَأَنْتُمْ عَنْهُ غَافِلُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

(12:13) He said, 'It really upsets me that you should take him away, and I fear the wolf may eat him while you are oblivious of him.'

This is their father's response to their request. He did not explicitly voice his distrust of them but mentioned his personal distress if they took Joseph away. He emphasized, '*It really upsets me that you should take him away ...*', gently alluding to the emotional state he would be in if they left with Joseph. This was a subtle way to respond to them, to avoid igniting any defiance or argumentativeness, showcasing the nuances of the narrative.

He further justified his reluctance to accede to their request by saying, '*and I fear the wolf may eat him while you are oblivious of him*.' This excuse is reasonable since pastures where livestock graze are naturally inhabited by wolves and other predators. These predators might target and prey upon the unsuspecting. It's plausible that the brothers might be preoccupied with something and neglect Joseph, allowing a wolf to attack him and carry him off.

قَالُوا لَئِنْ أَكَلَهُ الذِّئْبُ وَنَحْنُ عُصْبَةٌ إِنَّا إِذًا لَخَاسِرُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

(12:14) They said, 'Should the wolf eat him while we are a hardy group, then we will indeed be losers!'

The brothers reacted as if they had only understood their father's worry to be about the wolf eating Joseph while they are distracted and not about

their intentions towards Joseph. They responded with disbelief, emphasizing their collective strength and resilience. They swore by God that if a wolf were to eat Joseph while they, a formidable group, were present, it would certainly mean they had failed, and the implication is that they would never fail. Their oath—as indicated by the emphasis in their statement—was intended to reassure their father and dispel his worries so that he would let them go with Joseph. Such expressions often imply a tacit promise, in this case, that they would remain vigilant. However, it did not take long before they contradicted what they had sworn to and broke the promise they implicitly made when they said: *'Father! We had gone racing and left Joseph with our things, whereat the wolf ate him. But you will not believe us even if we spoke truly'* (12:17).

فَلَمَّا ذَهَبُوا بِهِ وَأَجْمَعُوا أَنْ يَجْعَلُوهُ فِي غَيَابَتِ الْجُبِّ ۚ وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِ
لَتُنَبِّئَنَّهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِمْ هَٰذَا وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

> (12:15) So when they took him away and conspired (*ajmaʿū*) to put him into the recess of a well... and We revealed to him, 'you will surely inform them about this affair of theirs while they are not aware.'

Al-Rāghib says: 'The verb *ajmaʿa* (translated here as 'conspire') in most contexts implies a collective decision arrived at through thought, as seen in the verse, *So conspire together* (fa-ajmaʿū amra-kum)*, along with your partners* (10:71). It is also said, "The Muslims have agreed on such-and-such," (*ajmaʿa al-muslimūn ʿalā kadhā*), meaning their views have converged on it.'

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī writes: '*Ajmaʿū* means they unanimously resolved to place him at the bottom of the well, their motives aligning in this decision. If only one person calls for something, one cannot say that there is a consensus about it. The term seems to be derived from the convergence of motives.'

Therefore, the verse implies that they convinced their father with their words, reassuring him enough to allow them to take Joseph out to the wilderness with them. They then took him with them to execute their scheme of throwing him into the well's depths.

Note that the consequent phrase for '*When* ...' is left implicit to

emphasize the enormity and horror of the act. This is a common rhetorical device: a speaker describing a horrific event like a shocking murder, which deeply moves the heart and is difficult to hear. They detail its causes and circumstances, describing it until the very moment of the event, before falling into profound silence. They might then describe the aftermath of the murder, implying that the act itself was too horrific to relate directly and too heart-wrenching for listeners to bear.

It is as if the one describing the story, God Almighty, when stating, *when they took him away and conspired to put him into the recess of a well...*, pauses deeply, refraining from detailing their treatment of the child out of sorrow and compassion. The listener's heart cannot bear the thought of what they did to this innocent, wronged prophet, the son of prophets, who committed no crime to warrant their treatment of him. These were his brothers, well aware of the profound love their dear father Jacob held for him. How terrible is envy! It led siblings to cast into perdition someone as righteous as Joseph with their own hands. It caused a noble father like Jacob grief at the hands of his own sons, and made a heinous act seem palatable in the eyes of men raised in the prophetic tradition, who had been nurtured in the household of prophets.

After achieving the desired effect through this omission, God continues the narrative saying, *... and We revealed to him ...*

***... and We revealed to him, 'you will surely inform them about this affair of theirs while they are not aware'***—The pronoun '*him*' refers to Joseph. The apparent meaning of revelation suggests prophetic inspiration. The reference to '*this affair of theirs*' is their act of throwing him into the well. It also seems that the phrase '*while they are not aware*' refers to the revelation indicated by the statement: *and We revealed to him*. The clause, '*they are not aware*', relates either to the true nature of their deed or to the revelation received by Joseph, meaning they are unaware of what was revealed to him.

Therefore, the meaning appears to be: 'We revealed to Joseph, "I swear you will surely inform them of the reality of this matter and the interpretation of what they did to you. For they see it as a negation of your personhood, the oblivion of your name, the extinguishing of your light, a humiliation, and a devaluation of your worth. But in truth, it brings you closer to the seat of honor and the throne of sovereignty, immortalizes

your memory, completes your light, and elevates your stature. Yet, they are unaware of this reality. You will one day inform them of this." This is reflected in his words to them when he reclined on his seat of honor and they stood before him pleading, saying: *'O mighty one! Distress has befallen our family, and us, and we have brought a meagre sum. Yet grant us the full measure, and be charitable to us! Indeed Allah rewards the charitable.' He said, 'Have you realized what you did to Joseph and his brother, when you were senseless?' ... 'I am Joseph, and this is my brother. Certainly Allah has shown us favor'* (12:88–90).

Consider Joseph's statement to his brothers, '*Have you realized ...?*', for it implies that what they were witnessing that day was really the outcome of their actions towards Joseph. And his words, '*when you were senseless*', parallel the verse under discussion in which God says: ... *while they are not aware*.

Other explanations of the verse have been offered:

One is: 'You will inform your brothers of what they did to you at a time when they do not recognise you.' This is what he spoke to them in Egypt when they did not recognise him and then he revealed his identity to them.

Another is: Informing them means meting out punishment to them for the evil they did, akin to when one threatens someone who wronged them by saying, 'I will teach you a lesson' or 'I will make you pay.'

Some, citing Ibn 'Abbās, argue that the verse refers to the events that unfolded with his brothers in Egypt, where he recognized them, but they did not recognise him. He then took a cup and made a prophetic gesture with it, hinting at their previous actions and saying something to the effect of, 'This cup informs me that you had a brother, whom you cast into a well and sold for a paltry sum.'

Some of these explanations can be seen as far-fetched, with the most likely being the one initially presented. The idea of informing people about their own actions frequently appears in the Qur'an, indicating a revelation of the true nature of deeds. For instance, in Sūrah al-Mā'ida (5:105), God says, *To Allah will be the return of you all, whereat He will inform you concerning what you used to do.* In the same chapter (5:14), God says: *and soon Allah will inform them concerning what they had been doing*. And in Sūrah al-Mujādila (58:6), God says: *The day when Allah will raise them all together, He will inform them about what they have done*, among many

other verses.

Another explanation some have given is that the meaning of *And We revealed to him* ... is that you will inform them of what they did to you, and they are unaware of this revelation. This reading is plausible, but there's a nuance in narrowing the meaning of the statement with this restriction, and there seems to be no obvious need for it.

Others argue that the meaning of the verse is to inform them about the elevation of your life, your status, and your dominion due to their actions. For God will make you prevail over them, humble them before you, and make your vision come true while they remain unaware of what God has granted you.

The main difference between this explanation and the one previously mentioned is that this shifts the informing from verbal communication to a manifestation in external circumstances and actual status. There's no basis for this reading after considering the statement, *Have you realized what you did to Joseph and his brother, when you were senseless?*

وَجَاءُوا أَبَاهُمْ عِشَاءً يَبْكُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

(12:16) In the evening (*'ishā'*), they came weeping to their father

*'Ishā'* refers to the end of the day, and some say it lasts from the time of the Maghrib prayer until dusk. They were weeping to make their story appear genuine so that their father would believe them and not doubt their words.

قَالُوا يَا أَبَانَا إِنَّا ذَهَبْنَا نَسْتَبِقُ وَتَرَكْنَا يُوسُفَ عِنْدَ مَتَاعِنَا فَأَكَلَهُ الذِّئْبُ ۖ وَمَا أَنْتَ بِمُؤْمِنٍ لَنَا وَلَوْ كُنَّا صَادِقِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

(12:17) They said, 'Father! We had gone racing (*nastabiq*) and left Joseph with our things, whereat the wolf ate him. But you will not believe us even if we spoke truly.'

In his *Mufradāt*, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī states that the root of *sabq* (from which the verb *nastabiq* is derived) means to go on ahead, as in: *by those who take the lead, racing* (fa al-sābiqāt sabqan); *We had gone racing* (nastabiq); *They raced to the door* (wa istabaqā al-bāb).

In *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*, al-Zamakhsharī comments: 'The verb *nastabiq*

means that they went racing one another, as the verb forms VIII and VI share the same meaning in some verbs, like the verbs *intiḍāl* and *tanāḍul* ('to contend') or *irtimā'* and *tarāmī* ('to throw at one another'). The meaning here is either racing on foot or competing with one another in throwing.'

In *Tafsīr al-Manār*, Rashīd Riḍā writes: '"*We had gone racing*" means "We left our gathering place for the race, with each of us striving to surpass the other." Racing involves effort, which is the essence of competition. Sometimes the race is for the sake of racing itself, or sometimes there's another purpose. For instance, *so take the lead in all good works* (fa-istabiqū al-khayrāt) (2:148) means racing for its own sake, not to win. By contrast, the subsequent phrase in this chapter, *They raced to the door* (12:25) does indicate an intent to win: Joseph's intent to escape, while the wife of Protiphar intended to give chase and hold him back. The mutual form does not convey this meaning, and al-Zamakhsharī, an expert in language, and those who followed him, overlooked this subtle distinction.'

**Comment:** Contrary to Rashīd Riḍā's assertion, the verse, *so take the lead in all good works*, does suggest competition with the intent to win. This is because it is religiously recommended that an individual should not prioritize others over himself in performing good deeds, receiving rewards, or seeking closeness to God. The individual should strive to surpass others in acquiring blessings. Thus, 'taking the lead' here does correspond to 'racing against one another'. Similarly, in the verse *They raced to the door* (12:25), the clear implication is that each of them was trying to outrun the other to the door: one to open it and the other to prevent its opening. This captures the essence of 'racing'. Hence, the meanings of 'competing' (*istibāq*) and 'racing' (*tasābuq*) genuinely converge based on the context. According to *Ṣiḥāḥ*, to 'compete' in running means to 'race'. In *Lisān al-'Arab*, the terms are used interchangeably.

The reason for the semantic convergence of 'compete' (*istabaq*) and 'race' (*tasābuq*) might be that the essence of 'competing' inherently involves an added effort. The structure of the verb *istabaq* (which is *bāb al-ifti'āl* or a Form VIII verb) intensifies the meaning of the action and emphasizes the agent's immersion in the act, making it a part of himself. This is evident in examples like 'earning' (*kasb*) and 'striving to earn' (*iktisāb*), 'carrying' (*ḥaml*) and 'taking on a burden' (*iḥtimāl*), 'persevering' (*ṣabr*) and

'deeply persevering' (*iṣṭibār*), and 'approaching' (*qurb*) and coming closer' (*iqtirāb*), 'hiding' (*khafī*) and 'concealing' (*ikhtifā'*), or 'struggling' (*juhd*) and 'striving intensely' (*ijtihād*). When this pattern is superimposed on the root of *sabq* ('competing'), creating the verb *istibāq*, it signifies the agent's determination to attain success for himself, which can only be achieved in the context of racing.

***But you will not believe us*** **(bi mu'min la-nā)**—*mu'min* means 'someone who believes or confirms our words'. *Mu'min* is the active participle of the verb *īmān*, which can be made transitive with the preposition *la*, as in the verse *Thereupon Lot believed in him* (fa āmana la-hu Lūṭ) (29:26).

The meaning is that when they approached their father in the evening, weeping, they said, 'O father, we group of brothers went to the wilderness to race'—probably a foot race, as that would make it harder for them to reach their belongings—'we left Joseph with our belongings, and a wolf devoured him. And it only adds to our distress and disgrace that you will never believe what we say, even if we are truthful.'

Their statement, ... *But you will not believe us even if we spoke truly*, is a sentiment that one in a defensive position might express when they are out of options and their attempts at deceit are evident. It implies that they recognise their words may not be convincing, but they have no choice but to communicate what they believe to be true, even if it's not perceived as such. This is meant to demonstrate their sincerity. However, God says, *And they produced sham blood* (dam kadhib) *on his shirt*, revealing their deception. Note that the word *kadhib* here is a verbal noun being used to convey the meaning of an active participle, which conveys a hyperbolic meaning ('lying blood'), as though the blood itself is lying.

Therefore, the verse subtly communicates that the shirt, with the blood stain—note that the term for blood is left indefinite, hinting at the weakness of its evidentiary value—contradicted their claims. If a wild animal had truly attacked and consumed Joseph, it would not have left an intact shirt behind, untouched and undamaged. This is the nature of deception; a false narrative or fabrication often contains inconsistencies or contradictions, or there are external signs and situations that surround it, bespeaking its untruthfulness, exposing the façade, and revealing the ugliness of its interior, no matter how presentable it may seem on the surface.

## On the Inevitable Failure of Lies

It is a well-tested truth that lies do not endure. Even if the liar temporarily manages to deceive, he inevitably slips up, revealing the falsehoods he's spread or exposing the fabrications he's made. The rationale behind this is that the universe operates on an orderly system. Its various parts are interconnected by relations and attributes that are consistent and immutable. Every external event comes with its own set of circumstances and consequences, each one interrelated. If one part is disrupted, the entire chain is affected. The integrity of a single link determines the integrity of the whole chain. This is a universal law that admits no exceptions.

Consider, for example, the movement of an object from one place to another within a specified time. Its transition would necessarily involve leaving the first location, becoming distant from it, and disappearing from the associated surroundings. The original place would be vacated while the new one would be occupied, with the object passing through the space in between, along with other necessary implications. If any part of this process was disrupted—such as the object being present in the original location during the specified time—then the entire set of related conditions would collapse.

Humans, or any other presumed force, are incapable of fully hiding the myriad of realities embedded in the universe. Even if one tries to mask a particular fact, it is impossible to conceal all the implications and realities associated with it, divert them from their natural course, or distort them. If one layer of reality is hidden, another emerges, and if not that, then the next. Thus, deception always unravels.

The state of truth will always prevail, even if falsehood seems to hold sway momentarily. Honesty has inherent value, even if there are times when lies seem enticing. God states, *Indeed Allah does not guide someone who is a liar and an ingrate* (39:3) He also says, *Indeed Allah does not guide someone who is a profligate, a liar* (40:28). Additionally, *Indeed those who fabricate lies against Allah will not be felicitous* (16:116) and *Rather they denied the truth when it came to them; so they are now in a perplexed state of affairs* (50:5). This is because when they regarded the truth as falsehood, they built their beliefs on lies and relied on them throughout their lives, leading them into a contradictory and conflicting system of belief.

Commentary continues:

وَجَاءُوا عَلَىٰ قَمِيصِهِ بِدَمٍ كَذِبٍ ۚ قَالَ بَلْ سَوَّلَتْ لَكُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ أَمْرًا ۖ
فَصَبْرٌ جَمِيلٌ ۖ وَاللَّهُ الْمُسْتَعَانُ عَلَىٰ مَا تَصِفُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

**(12:18) He said, 'Rather your souls have made a matter seem decorous to you. Yet patience is graceful, and Allah is the resort against what you allege.'**

This is Jacob's response when his sons suddenly told him about the loss of his beloved son Joseph. His elder sons came to him without Joseph, crying, telling him that a wolf had devoured their younger brother, presenting a blood-stained shirt as evidence. Jacob, aware of their envy towards Joseph and how they had previously insisted on taking him away, recognized their deceit. The blood on the shirt was false evidence, calling out their lie.

Jacob refuted their claim, '*We had gone racing ...*' with, '*Rather your souls have made a matter seem decorous to you* (sawwalat la-kum anfusukum amran)...' The word *sawwalat* indicates whispering or prompting, meaning the matter is not as they claim, but rather their souls have deceived them into thinking it so. Jacob ambiguously refers to '*a matter*', without specifying what it is. He then communicates that he is patient in this ordeal and will not seek to punish them. His patience stems from his knowledge that the absence of Joseph is not because of a wolf attack but due to a vile plot hatched by them.

When he says, *Yet patience is graceful*, this is an appreciation of patience itself. This phrasing puts forth patience as the cause for the aftermath, suggesting the meaning, 'I will be patient in facing this ordeal, for patience is beautiful.' The fact that patience is left indefinite and its adjective is kept implicit emphasizes its either its importance and magnificence or the bitterness and difficulty in practicing it.

The statement, *Yet patience is graceful*, follows logically from the preceding verses, indicating that the circumstances surrounding Jacob dictated nothing but patience. Jacob faced the traumatic loss of his dearest son Joseph. The disturbing tale that his elder sons brought him was that Joseph had fallen prey to a wolf, and they supported this by producing a blood-stained shirt—but Jacob did not trust their account. He sensed their involvement and scheming in Joseph's disappearance. Yet, he had no means of ascertaining the truth of what befell his son, where he was, or

what condition he was in. His only allies and sources of support in such trials should have been his sons. Yet, they were powerful and formidable, and if they were the cause of this calamity, how could he confront them or protect himself from them? His only option in such a situation was to adopt patience.

However, patience does not merely mean to endure hardships passively or allow oneself to succumb meekly to those who wish to do you harm, like a dead land trampled underfoot and used at will. On the contrary, God has instilled in humans the instinct to repel adversity and equipped them with the means to confront such challenges as best as they can. There is no virtue in ignoring this divine instinct. Rather, true patience involves maintaining one's inner equanimity and preserving one's psychological wellbeing, as it is these that ensure the stability of human existence. It involves regulating one's emotions to prevent oneself from going to pieces and becoming afflicted by inattention, confusion, and poor judgement. There are those who demonstrate patience stand firm amidst adversities, who are not swayed by the onslaught of misfortunes, while others falter at the first sign of challenge, often losing their way as a result.

With this in mind, we can see that patience is indeed the right approach to counter adversity and break its stranglehold. Yet, patience is also not the only factor needed to restore one's own wellbeing and security. Patience is like a fortress behind which one seeks protection from an attacking enemy. However, if one wishes to truly regain the blessings of security, peace, and freedom in life, one might need another factor, a driving force towards victory. In the monotheistic belief, this force is God, in all His majestic authority. When a believer faces trials or adversities, they should first arm themselves with patience to maintain their internal spiritual order and prevent the disintegration of their faculties and emotions. Subsequently, they should place their trust in God, who transcends all causes, hoping that He will repel harm and guide their affairs to the best outcome. God, in His glory, is always in control. This topic has been previously touched upon in our commentary on the verse: *And take recourse in patience and prayer* (2:45).

In light of all this, when Jacob declared, '*Yet patience is graceful*', he followed it up by saying, '*and Allah is the resort against what you allege.*' In doing so, he complemented the practice of patience with the principle

of relying upon God, echoing a sentiment found in the subsequent verses: *'Rather your souls have made a matter seem decorous to you. Yet patience is graceful. Maybe Allah will bring them all to me. Indeed He is the All-knowing, the All-wise'* (12:83).

*'... and Allah is the resort against what you allege'*—this is indeed a profound statement—illustrates Jacob's placing his trust in his Lord. It is as though he is saying: 'I know you have had a hand in this matter, and I know that Joseph was not eaten by a wolf. Yet, I do not solely depend on apparent means to expose your lies or to recover Joseph, means which are ineffective without God's permission. I will not allow myself to become entangled in those means; instead, I will maintain my composure through patience and place my trust in my Lord to reveal the truth about what you allege, that Joseph has met his end and became a meal for a wolf.'

Therefore, when Jacob says, '*and Allah is the resort against what you allege*', this is a prayer uttered in a moment of utter trust and reliance upon God. The meaning is: 'O God, I place my trust in You regarding this matter, so assist me against what these sons of mine allege!' The phrasing is structured to emphasize the singular act of seeking help, suggesting that God alone is the one from whom he seeks help, and that there is no other upon whom he depends. Indeed, Jacob asserts that the only true judgement is God's judgement, as he will say later, '*Judgement belongs only to Allah. In Him I have put my trust*' (12:67), in order to expound this ideal of monotheistic reliance. Notice that he does not mention himself in the present verse: He does not say 'I will be patient', or 'I will seek God's help against what you allege.' On the contrary, he leaves out himself and mentions only the name of his Lord, showing that he believes the matter is solely in God's hands. This represents the perfection of his monotheism. He's engulfed in his sorrow and grief for Joseph, but he does not love Joseph, nor feel loss for him, except for the sake of God and through God.

وَجَاءَتْ سَيَّارَةٌ فَأَرْسَلُوا وَارِدَهُمْ فَأَدْلَىٰ دَلْوَهُ ۖ قَالَ يَا بُشْرَىٰ هَٰذَا غُلَامٌ ۚ
وَأَسَرُّوهُ بِضَاعَةً ۚ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

(12:19) And there came a caravan, and they sent their water drawer (*wārida-hum*), who let down his bucket (*adlā dalwa-hu*). 'Good news!' he said. 'This is a young boy!' So they hid

him (*asirrū-hu*) as merchandise, and Allah knew best what they were doing.

Al-Rāghib says: '*Wurūd* (from whence the word *wārid* is derived) originally referred to fetching water, but it came to be used in other contexts.' He adds: 'To lower the bucket is expressed by the verb *dalā*, and to retrieve it is expressed by the verb *adlā*. Another opinion is the reverse of these two meanings.' He also states: '*Isrār* (from whence *asirrū* is derived) means to hide secretly as opposed to declaring openly.'

***'Good news!' he said. 'This is a young boy!'***—This is mentioned separately from the previous statement (*who let down his bucket*), even though it occurred as a direct consequence of it, to show that this event was unexpected. What they anticipated from withdrawing their bucket from the well was to retrieve water, not to discover a boy. It was a surprise, hence he exclaimed: 'Good news!'

The phrase, *and Allah knew best what they were doing*, might imply disapproval of their actions, highlighting that it was a sin they are accountable for, and for which they will be held to account. Alternatively, it could mean that this event happened with the knowledge of God, intending by this that Joseph would reach the destiny He had ordained for him. Had he not been extracted from the well and sold as merchandise, he wouldn't have entered the house of Potiphar in Egypt and wouldn't have achieved the status and position bestowed upon him later on.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is that a passing group arrived at the location and sent someone to fetch water for them. He lowered his bucket into the well, and upon drawing it out, he was surprised to exclaim, 'Good news! Here's a boy!'—as Joseph had clung to the rope and emerged. They then hid him among their merchandise, intending to sell or trade him, even as God Almighty was fully aware of their actions, either to hold them accountable or because this had been divinely ordained. Joseph's journey led him to a future of honor, sovereignty, and prophethood.

وَشَرَوْهُ بِثَمَنٍ بَخْسٍ دَرَاهِمَ مَعْدُودَةٍ وَكَانُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الزَّاهِدِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

(12:20) And they sold him (*sharaw-hu*) for a cheap price (*thaman bakhs*), a few dirhams (*darāhima ma'dūda*), for they set small store by him (*kānū fī-hi min al-zāhidīn*).

A *thaman bakhs* ('cheap price') refers to selling an item for an amount that is less than its true value. *Darāhima ma'dūda* ('a few dirhams') implies a small amount. It has been said that when they had many coins, they would weigh them and would only count the smaller amounts. The term *darāhim* refers to the circulating silver currency of their time. The verb *sharaw* means selling. *Zuhd* (from whence *zāhidīn* is derived) means to not desire something greatly, or to be cautious about it.

The context suggests that the pronouns in *And they sold him* and *they set* refer to the caravan. This means that the caravan traders, who had extracted Joseph from the well and initially hid him as merchandise, sold him for a meagre price, which was a number of coins small enough to be countered rather than weighed, being wary that the truth might be revealed—that he was not, in fact, a slave—and Joseph might be taken from them as a result.

However, the majority of commentators believe that the pronouns refer to Joseph's brothers, suggesting that they sold Joseph to the caravan. They claimed that Joseph was their servant who had fallen into the well, and they had merely come to retrieve him. So, they sold him to the caravan, being cautious about the truth being revealed that he was actually their brother.

Another reading is that the first pronoun refers to Joseph's brothers and the second to the caravan. This implies that the brothers sold him for a paltry sum, while the caravan merchants were reluctant or feigned indifference to secure a lower price. They might have been genuinely hesitant to purchase him, suspecting deceit, given that Joseph did not have the appearance of a typical slave.

However, the context and tone of the verses does not favor either of these readings, as the pronouns in the preceding verse clearly relate to the caravan, and the brothers have not been explicitly mentioned afterward such that the pronouns in the phrases, *And they sold him* and *they set*, to refer back to them. The apparent meaning of the subsequent verse, *The man from Egypt who had bought him …*, confirms that this purchase was made in good faith.

Regarding the narrations that state: 'Joseph's brothers arrived there, took Joseph from the caravan claiming he was their servant who had fallen into the well, and then sold him to them for a low price,' such accounts do

cohere with the apparent context of the verses, nor the other narrations on this topic.

One might argue that the verb *sharaw* used in this verse actually refers to purchase rather than sale, which is a common usage of the verb in the Arabic language. However, this is refuted by the context of the verses.

وَقَالَ الَّذِي اشْتَرَاهُ مِنْ مِصْرَ لِامْرَأَتِهِ أَكْرِمِي مَثْوَاهُ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَنْفَعَنَا أَوْ نَتَّخِذَهُ وَلَدًا ۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلِنُعَلِّمَهُ مِنْ تَأْوِيلِ الْأَحَادِيثِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ غَالِبٌ عَلَىٰ أَمْرِهِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

(12:21) The man from Egypt who had bought him said to his wife, 'Give him an honorable place. Maybe he will be useful to us, or we may adopt him as a son.' Thus We established Joseph in the land and that We might teach him the interpretation of dreams. Allah has command of His affairs, but most people do not know.

The context implies that the caravan brought Joseph to Egypt and offered him for sale. One of the Egyptians then bought him and took him into his home.

The verses are intriguing when they speak of '*the man from Egypt*' who made the purchase. Firstly, the phrase, *The man from Egypt who had bought him*, informs us that he was an Egyptian. Secondly, the mention, *and they ran into her husband* (sayyid-ha) *at the door* (12:25) indicates that he was a prominent figure. Thirdly, the statement, *Some of the townswomen said, 'The chieftain's wife has solicited her slave boy! He has captivated her love.'* (12:30), clarifies that he was a notable figure in Egypt, entrusted with authority and protection. This is further supported by the mention of his having a prison, signifying his role as a ruler and a leader among the people. From this, it's understood that Joseph was initially bought by a prominent figure in Egypt and entered a noble house.

Overall, every time the man from Egypt is described in God's words, it's only to the extent that the narration of the story requires. The initial introduction did not need more than to describe him as an Egyptian with a residence. Hence, it sufficed to say, "*The man from Egypt*."

To elaborate, the verse, in its brevity, informs us that the caravan took

Joseph with them to Egypt, offered him to some locals, and he was then purchased by one of them. He was subsequently taken to that person's home, where his wife was instructed, *'Give him an honorable place. Maybe he will be useful to us, or we may adopt him as a son'* (12:21).

The prevailing custom in Egypt appears to have been that the elite would not care for their slaves unless they discerned signs of nobility and wisdom in the slave's demeanor, noticing traits of competence and good fortune. Especially for kings, sultans, and leaders, who regularly had dozens, even hundreds, of the finest young men and women enter their courts. They would not be enamoured with each one nor show favor to everyone they encountered. The chief's desire to honor Joseph and his hope to benefit from him or adopt him holds profound significance, especially considering he entrusted this to his wife, the lady of the house. It is uncommon for queens and noblewomen to deal with minor details or trivial matters, nor is it customary for such distinguished ladies to directly handle the affairs of slaves and young servants.

Certainly, Joseph possessed a captivating beauty that dazzled people's minds and enchanted their hearts. Alongside his physical allure, he was endowed with virtues of impeccable character: patience, dignity, gracefulness in his movements, eloquence in his speech, wisdom in his discourse, nobility in his spirit, and honor in his lineage. These attributes do not just appear suddenly in a person; they have roots embedded from the days of youth, with their traces visibly present from the very beginning.

It was these very qualities in Joseph that drew the Egyptian official known as al-ʿAzīz in the Qur'an (and Potiphar in the Bible) to Joseph, even though he was but a young boy. Potiphar wished that Joseph should grow up in the environs of his household, hoping he would become a close confidant to assist in important matters or undertake great endeavours. He even hoped that Joseph might become, through adoption, a son to him and his wife, and thus an heir to his noble household.

From this, one can infer that Potiphar was childless, unable to have children with his wife, which further solidified his hope to adopt Joseph as their own.

When God says, "*The man from Egypt who had bought him said to his wife, 'Give him an honorable place. Maybe he will be useful to us, or we may adopt him as a son'*, it implies that Potiphar was advising his wife, the

esteemed lady, to personally ensure Joseph's well-being and to grant him a dignified status in their home. This was done in the hope that Joseph would aid them in their noble objectives or even be adopted by them.

***Thus We established*** **(makkanā)** ***Joseph in the land and that We might teach him the interpretation of dreams. Allah has command of His affairs, but most people do not know***—al-Rāghib says:

'*Makān* ('place', from whence the verb *makkanā* is derived) is a place that contains or holds something. The term has been used in various forms in the Qur'an to signify the idea of grounding or settling: *Certainly We have established you on the earth* (makkannā-kum fī al-arḍ) (7:10); *Certainly We had granted them power* (makkannā-hum) *in respects that We have not granted you* (makkannā-kum) (46:26); *Did We not establish* (a wa lam numakkin la-hum) *a secure sanctuary for them …?* (28:57); *… and to establish them in the land* (wa numakkin la-hum fī al-arḍ) (28:6).

The lexicographer al-Khalīl says: "*Makān* is a noun of place derived from *kawn* ('to be', hence 'a place of being'), but it was used so extensively in everyday speech that it came to be treated as an independent word on the pattern of *fa'āl* instead."

Therefore, one might use the verbs *tamakkan* and *tamaskan* in the same vein as *tamanzil* (where *tamaskan* is a verb made from *maskan*, meaning "place of dwelling", and *tamanzil* is a verb made from *manzil*, meaning "a resting station").' Therefore, *makān* could signify a physical place on earth or, at times, metaphorically imply a status or rank in knowledge or among people. The term can sometimes signify capability or empowerment. In the context of Joseph's story, his "establishment in the land" possibly refers to him being given stability, enjoying the pleasures of life, and the ability to thrive, especially after the trials he faced when his brothers denied him the right to live freely. They had cast him into the depths of a well and later sold him for a paltry sum, leading him to be transported from one land to another, far from his homeland and the abode of his father.

God mentions the fact that He established Joseph in the land twice within his story. The first instance follows the narrative of Joseph's escape from the well, his journey to Egypt in a caravan, and his sale to Potiphar. This part of the narrative is summed up in the verse, *Thus We established Joseph in the land …* (12:21). The second instance comes after the account

of his release from Potiphar's prison and his appointment over Egypt's treasuries, as stated, *That is how We established Joseph in the land that he may settle in it wherever he wished* (12:56). Both instances demonstrate God's special concern for Joseph.

Therefore, when God says, *Thus We established Joseph in the land …*, this refers to his escape from the well, his sale into slavery, and his subsequently being lodged in Potiphar's house. If *Thus We established … in the land* relates only to the degree of security he gained upon entering and dwelling in Potiphar's house—where his comfort was ensured by Potiphar's command—then the analogy invoked by '*Thus*' (*kadhālik*) is similar to likening something to itself to emphasize the abundance of described qualities. This is not a derogatory comparison, as seen in the lines of poetry:

'As if we and the water around us /
Were people sitting surrounded by water.'

Rather, the meaning is that the establishment that God granted Joseph in the land is akin to what He has already described in the previous verses. Such analogy serves to gently draw the listener's attention to the richness of the attributes, emphasize their significance, and make them appear attractive, as analogies often do.

Similar rhetorical constructions can be seen in other verses of the Qur'an, for example: *There is nothing like unto Him* (42:11), and: *Let all the workers work for the like of this* (37:61). The former emphasizes that nothing resembles or equates to God's attributes, while the latter suggests that all qualities embodied by paradise are worth striving for the sake of.

If 'establishment' here is meant to signify a complete establishment in the land, the comparison is akin to likening the whole to some of its parts. This is to indicate that the state of the remaining parts of Joseph's story is like that of the part that has just been described. In essence, then, God's establishment of Joseph in the land follows the pattern mentioned in his story: His exit from the well, his journey to Egypt, and his comfortable settlement in Potiphar's house. His brothers, out of jealousy, denied him comfort by his father's side, threw him into the well, deprived him of the pleasures of his homeland, and sold him into a foreign land. Yet, God turned their plots into a means for Joseph to prosper and settle comfortably in Potiphar's house in Egypt. Then, Potiphar's wife and the women of Egypt conspired to seduce him into indiscretions, but God diverted

their schemes and, in doing so, demonstrated Joseph's sincerity and faith. Eventually, they sought to imprison him and strip him of social freedoms. However, God turned that very situation into a means for Joseph's ultimate establishment in the land, granting him authority to settle wherever he wished, free from hindrance or deterrence.

In this light then, the present verse is akin to the words of God: *That is how Allah leads astray the faithless* (40:74) and His statement: *That is how Allah draws comparisons* (13:17). In other words, God's act of misleading the disbelievers always follows such-and-such a pattern, and His presentation of parables is always in this manner of the example given, serving as a standard by which others should be measured.

***... and that We might teach him*** **(wa li-nuʿallima-hu)** ***the interpretation of dreams***—This clarifies the purpose of God establishing Joseph in the land. The particle *li* ('in order that') here denotes purpose. This is in relation to an implicit statement, the meaning of which is: 'We established him on the earth so that we might do such-and-such with him, and teach him the interpretation of dreams.' However, the implicit part of this statement is omitted to indicate that there are other purposes which are not explicitly mentioned here, similar to God's statement *Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who possess certitude* (6:75) and the like thereof.

***Allah has command of His affair, but most people do not know***—It appears that *affair* here refers to the matter at hand or what God enacts in the creation, which constitutes the orderly management of affairs. God states, *He directs the command* (32:5). This affair is attributed to God because He is the master of all affairs, as God states, *Look! All creation and command belong to Him. Blessed is Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.* (7:54).

The implication is that every matter related to creation and origination is under God's command, and He is supremely dominant over it. It is subdued before Him, obedient to His will, complying with His desires. It does not have the capacity to defy or rebel, nor can it operate outside of His authority. Nor can any matter pre-empt God or elude Him, as God states, *Indeed Allah carries through His command* (65:3).

In summary, God is dominant over these immediate causes; by His decree, they carry out His intentions. They have no choice but to listen and obey. However, most people are unaware, mistakenly believing that

apparent causes operate independently of Him in their effects, presuming that if events head in a certain direction, nothing can divert them from their course. In this, they are utterly mistaken.

## Examining Narrations

(1) In *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates via his chain from Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī: 'I prayed the *fajr* prayer in Medina with ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn on a Friday. After he completed his prayers and praises, he proceeded to his house, and I accompanied him. He called for his servant named Sakīna and instructed her, "Do not turn away any beggar from my door today without feeding him, for today is Friday." I remarked, "But not everyone who begs truly deserves help." He replied, "O Thābit, I fear that among those who ask us might be someone with a rightful claim. If we do not feed them and turn them away, a misfortune might befall our household similar to what befell Jacob and his family. So, feed them.

Surely Jacob used to slaughter a ram daily, distributing part of it in charity and consuming the remainder with his family. A sincere, fasting believer who begs has a special status with God. Once, a destitute stranger arrived at Jacob's doorstep on a Friday evening at the time of breaking his fast. He repeatedly cried out, "Please feed the hungry, passing stranger from the bounty of your food!" His pleas went unanswered, and they neither recognized his right nor believed his words.

When it became evident to the stranger that he would not be fed and night had fallen upon him, he moved on, pouring out his hunger and complaints to God. He spent the night bent in humility, and woke up continuing his fast, remaining patient and praising God. Meanwhile, Jacob and his family went to bed satiated, waking up with surplus food.

God, the Almighty, revealed to Jacob the following morning, "Oh Jacob, you humiliated my servant in a manner that has invoked my wrath and necessitates my reprimand. It has warranted my punishment and trials upon you and your progeny. My most beloved and honored prophets are those who show compassion to the needy of my servants, who draw them close, feed them, and provide them

shelter and refuge. Oh Jacob, you showed no mercy last evening to my striving servant—one content with the bare minimum of this world's offerings. He approached your door at the time of breaking his fast, pleading, 'Feed the passing, contented stranger,' yet you fed him nothing. He left disheartened, complaining of his plight to me. He spent the night hungry, humbled, praising me, and woke up fasting for my sake. Meanwhile, you, Jacob, and your children went to bed full and woke up with more than enough food.'

"Do you not know, O Jacob, that punishments and tribulations come swifter to my allies than to my enemies? Such swift action is a mark of my favor toward my allies and a gradual entrapment for my enemies. By my honor, I will indeed send trials upon you and make you and your offspring the target of afflictions. I will discipline you with my chastisement. Prepare for my trials, accept my decree, and remain patient during adversities."'

I asked ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn : "When did Joseph see the vision?" He replied, "On that very night when Jacob and his household went to bed satiated, and the humble servant spent it hungry and bent. When Joseph recounted his dream to his father Jacob the next morning, Jacob became deeply troubled by what he heard from Joseph and remained in this state. God then revealed to him to prepare for impending trials. Jacob advised Joseph, 'Do not narrate your dream to your brothers, for I fear they might conspire against you.' Nevertheless, Joseph did not keep his dream a secret and shared it with his brothers."

ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn continued, "The first trial that befell Jacob and his family was their envy towards Joseph after hearing about his dream. Jacob's affection for Joseph intensified. He feared that the forewarned trials might particularly afflict Joseph. Thus, his attachment to Joseph, out of all his children, grew even more profound.

When Joseph's brothers observed the preferential treatment and the favor that Jacob accorded Joseph over them, their resentment grew. This was the beginning of their trials. Amongst themselves, they said, '*Surely Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than*

*us, though we are a hardy group. Our father is indeed in manifest error Kill Joseph or cast him away into some land, so that your father's love may be exclusively yours, and that you may become a righteous lot after that.*' implying they would then repent.

At this point, they said to their father, '*Father! Why is it that you do not trust us with Joseph? We are indeed his well-wishers.*' Jacob responded, '*It really upsets me that you should take him away, and I fear the wolf may eat him while you are oblivious of him*' He reluctantly let them take Joseph, cautious and wary, fearing that the trials forewarned by God might specifically relate to Joseph due to his special place in his heart and his profound love for him. God's omnipotence and decree prevailed—manifesting in the events concerning Jacob, Joseph, and his brothers. Jacob was unable to prevent the misfortune that befell himself, Joseph, and their family. He entrusted Joseph to his brothers, albeit reluctantly, fearing the impending adversity from God concerning Joseph.

When they departed from their home, Jacob followed them swiftly. He took Joseph from them, embracing him tightly, shedding tears, and then returned him to them. They hurried away with Joseph, fearing Jacob might reclaim him. As they moved further away, they conspired about killing Joseph and hiding his body beneath a tree so that a wolf might devour him by night. But the eldest of them intervened, saying, '*Do not kill Joseph*', suggesting instead, " *throw him into the recess of some well so that some caravan may pick him up*."

They took Joseph to the well and cast him into it, assuming he would drown. Yet, from the well's depths, Joseph cried out to them, 'O sons of Rūmīn, convey my greetings to Jacob!' Upon hearing this, some of them told each other to stay until they were sure of his death. They finally gave up and returned to their father by evening, feigning tears and saying, '*Father! We had gone racing and left Joseph with our things, whereat the wolf ate him!*'

Upon hearing their fabricated tale, Jacob was deeply pained. He was reminded of God's earlier revelation about impending trials. Nevertheless, Jacob displayed patience in the face of this adversity, rebuking them, '*Rather your souls have made a matter seem*

*decorous to you.*' He added, confidently, that no wolf would harm Joseph before the true interpretation of his earlier dream was revealed.'

Abū Ḥamza said: "Alī b. al-Ḥusayn's speech was interrupted at this point.

'The next day, I approached Ali b. al-Ḥusayn and said, "May I be your ransom! Yesterday, you shared the story of Jacob and his sons but left it incomplete, particularly concerning Joseph's brothers and subsequent events involving Joseph."

He replied, "The following morning, his brothers said, 'Let's go and see Joseph's fate — whether he's dead or alive.'

As they approached the well, they found a caravan had already stopped by. A water drawer from the caravan lowered his bucket into the well, only to pull up a boy—Joseph. He excitedly exclaimed to his companions, *'Good news! This is a young boy!'* Joseph's brothers approached them, claiming, 'This is our servant who fell into this well yesterday. We came today to retrieve him.' They forcibly took Joseph from the caravan, pulling him aside and coercing him, 'Either acknowledge that you are our servant so we can sell you to the caravan or we will kill you.' To this, Joseph responded, 'Do not kill me; do as you please.'

They approached the caravan and said, 'Who among you will buy this slave from us?' A man from them purchased him for twenty dirhams. His brothers did not value him much. The one who bought him from the nomads took him until he entered Egypt. The nomadic man then sold him to the ruler of Egypt. This refers to the words of God Almighty, *The man from Egypt who had bought him said to his wife, 'Give him an honorable place. Maybe he will be useful to us, or we may adopt him as a son.'*"

Abū Ḥamza said: 'I asked ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn : "How old was Joseph when they threw him into the well?" He replied, "He was nine years old." I then asked, "How far was Jacob's residence from Egypt at that time?" He said, "It was a twelve-day journey."'

**Author's comment:** There is more to this narration which we will present later in this chapter. Some points might not directly align with the apparent meaning of the verses above, but they make sense upon deeper

reflection.

(2) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cite Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and Bukhārī, who report from Ibn ʿUmar, that the Messenger of God said: 'The noble son of the noble, son of the noble, son of the noble: Joseph, son of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham.'

(3) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is narrated from Zurāra, from Imām al-Bāqir : 'Prophets fall into five categories. Some hear a voice, like the sound of chains and understand its meaning. Some receive revelations in their dreams, like Joseph and Abraham . Others see visions, and yet others feel a weight in their hearts and hear a ringing in their ears.'

(4) In the same source, from Abū Khadīja, it was reported from a man from Imām al-Ṣādiq : 'The reason Jacob was tested with the ordeal of Joseph was because Jacob slaughtered a fat ram while one of his companions named Bayūm (or Baqūm) was in need and had nothing to break his fast with. Jacob overlooked him and did not feed him, so he was tested with the ordeal of Joseph. After that, every morning a caller would announce, "Whoever is not fasting, let him attend Jacob's lunch." And in the evening, "Whoever was fasting, let him attend Jacob's dinner."'

(5) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is narrated from Abū al-Jārūd, from Imām al-Bāqir , regarding the verse, *'you will surely inform them about this affair of theirs while they are not aware'* (12:15): 'This means: "They will not realize that you are Joseph." Gabriel came to him and informed him of this.'

(6) In the same source, it is narrated from Abū al-Jārūd, regarding the verse, *And they produced sham blood on his shirt* (12:18): 'They slaughtered a young goat on his shirt.'

(7) In the *Amālī* of Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, with a chain of narrators, concerning the Almighty's words, '*Yet patience is graceful*', it is said: 'Without complaints.'

**Author's comment:** This narration is from Imām al-Ṣādiq and was originally narrated following another tradition from him. This meaning was also narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr* from Ḥayyān b. Jabala, from the Prophet . And there are other narrations in addition to these on the aforementioned themes.

## Verses 22–34

The verses encompass the story of Joseph during his days in the house of Potiphar, where he was tested by Potiphar wife's infatuation with him and her attempts to seduce him. He also faced challenges with the women of the city's infatuation with him and their efforts to lure him into sin. This was a trial for him and, during this time, his chaste nature and pure intent manifested in an astonishing manner. Moreover, his devotion and love for his Lord were even more remarkable.

وَلَمَّا بَلَغَ أَشُدَّهُ آتَيْنَاهُ حُكْمًا وَعِلْمًا ۚ وَكَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(12:22) When he came of age (*balagha ashudda-hu*), We gave him judgement and knowledge, and thus do We reward the virtuous.

*Bulūgh al-ashadd* ('coming of age') refers to the age at which a person's physical strength is at its peak and his faculties are fortified, with the traces of childhood fading. This usually takes place from the age of eighteen up to the age of full intellectual maturity and rationality.

It appears that God's intent here is to refer to the beginning of young adulthood, rather than its midpoint or its end around forty. The evidence for this can be found in God's words regarding Moses : *When he came of age* (balagha ashudda-hu) *and became fully matured* (wa istawā)*, We gave him judgement and knowledge* (28:14). The word *istawā* implies reaching the midpoint. Another verse says: *When he comes of age* (balagha ashadda-hu) *and reaches forty years* (balagha arbaʿīn sana)*, he says, 'My Lord! Inspire me to give thanks for Your blessing* (46:15). If coming of age was the same as reaching forty, there would be no need for the repetition of the verb 'reached' (*balagha*).

In light of this, the claims of some commentators that coming of age refers to reaching the age of thirty or thirty-three, and others who claim it's the age of forty, do not hold. It is amusing to think that the wife of Potiphar restrained herself from Joseph during the peak of his youth and prime years only to become infatuated with him and try to seduce him as he approached forty, nearing middle age!

God's words, *We gave him judgement* (ḥukm), refers to giving him decisive speech that removes doubt from matters that are open to dispute. Inherently, this judgement encompasses a clear understanding of the vast realm of human knowledge, pertaining to the origin and the return to God, ethical values, divine laws, and societal norms.

Considering Joseph's statement to his fellow inmates in prison: *Sovereignty* (ḥukm) *belongs only to Allah* (12:40), and his later statement: *The matter about which you inquire has been decided* (quḍiya al-amr) (12:41), it is understood that the judgement he was endowed with was indeed the judgement of God; his decree was the decree of God. This is the same judgement that Abraham asked from his Lord when he said: *My Lord! Grant me judgement, and unite me with the Righteous* (26:83).

The words, *and knowledge* ('ilm), refer to God-given knowledge that, no matter its nature or quantity, is not tainted by ignorance. (*jahl*). Similarly, the aforementioned judgement is not influenced by personal desires or devilish insinuations. How could it be otherwise, when the one who bestowed these is God, the Exalted. God has stated: *Allah has command of His affair* (12:21), and *Indeed Allah carries through His command* (65:3). Thus, the judgement He bestows on His servants is free from doubt or hesitation, and the knowledge He grants is devoid of any ignorance.

It is obvious that these divine gifts are not arbitrary actions, nor are they frivolous or trivial on the part of God Almighty. Souls that are endowed with this discernment and knowledge are not equivalent to those souls that are mistaken in their judgements or immersed in their own ignorance. God has said, *The good land—its vegetation comes out by the permission of its Lord, and as for that which is bad, it does not come out except sparsely* (7:58). This point is driven home by His saying, *and thus do We reward the virtuous*—suggesting that this judgement and knowledge granted by God were not gifts given without a some cause to occasion them; rather, they are forms of recompense bestowed by God because the recipient of these gifts has been righteous aforehand.

Therefore, it is not far-fetched to infer from His saying, *and thus do We reward the virtuous*, that God Almighty rewards every benefactor—depending on the nature of their good deeds—with a measure of discernment and knowledge that is appropriate to their standing in righteousness. God has stated, *O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah and have faith in*

*His Messenger. He will grant you a double share of His mercy and give you a light to walk by* (57:28). And He also said, *Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people, like one who dwells in a manifold darkness …?* (6:122)

The knowledge mentioned in the verse must contain what God Almighty promised to teach Joseph regarding the interpretation of dreams, as it falls between His saying in the earlier verses, … *that We might teach him the interpretation of dreams* (12:21) and Joseph's recounting to his two prison companions, *That is among things my Lord has taught me* (12:37). So ponder on this.

وَرَاوَدَتْهُ الَّتِي هُوَ فِي بَيْتِهَا عَنْ نَفْسِهِ وَغَلَّقَتِ الْأَبْوَابَ وَقَالَتْ هَيْتَ لَكَ ۚ
قَالَ مَعَاذَ اللَّهِ ۖ إِنَّهُ رَبِّي أَحْسَنَ مَثْوَايَ ۖ إِنَّهُ لَا يُفْلِحُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(12:23) The woman in whose house he was solicited him (*rāwadat-hu*). She closed the doors (*ghallaqat al-abwāb*) and said, 'Come!' (*hayta la-ka!*) He said, 'God forbid! (*maʿādh Allāh*) Indeed He is my Lord; He has given me a good abode. Indeed the wrongdoers are not felicitous.'

In *al-Mufradāt*, al-Rāghib writes:

> '*Rawd* means to persistently and gently request something. From this comes the term *rā'id* for someone seeking pasture. The verb *irāda* is derived from the verb *rāda / yarūdu*, meaning to strive in seeking something. *Murāwada* (the infinitive of the verb in the verse) means to dispute with someone about a desire, wanting something other than what the other wants or rejecting what the other is seeking. Thus, when it is said *rāwadat-hu* ('she solicited him'), it means she tried to change his mind—in other words, he was refusing her advances. Based on this, when Joseph says, *'It was she who solicited me'* (hiya rāwadatnī ʿan nafsī) (12:25) or the townswomen say, '*The chieftain's wife has solicited her slave boy*' (turāwidu fatā-hā ʿan nafsi-hi) (12:30) it means to attempt to change one's mind. The same meaning can be observed in the wife of Potiphar's confession, '*Certainly I did solicit him*' (12:32), and in the words of Joseph's brothers about his younger brother Benjamin and their father Jacob, '*We will solicit him from his*

*father*' (12:61).'

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī writes:

> '*Murāwada* means to ask for something gently and kindly so that the request will be granted. From this is derived the word *murūd*, which refers to one who acts upon such a request. The verb *rāwada-hu* is not used when seeking repayment of a loan. The origin of the term is from the verb *rāda / yarūdu*, which means to seek pasture for one's herd animals. There is a figure of speech: "A seeker of pasture (*rāʾid*) doesn't lie to his family.' *Taghlīq* (from whence is derived the verb *ghallaqat*, or 'she closed') refers to securely locking a door in a way that makes it difficult to open, and this term is emphasized either to denote a strong locking mechanism or to exaggerate the act of her closing the doors.'

*Hayta la-ka* ('Come!') is an imperative verb, meaning 'come forth'. *Maʿādh Allāh* ('God forbid!') means 'I seek refuge in God!' Here, *maʿādh* behaves as an absolute object that stands in the place of the verb *aʿūdhu* ('I seek refuge...').

The verse, *The woman in whose house he was solicited him. She closed the doors and said, 'Come!!' He said, 'God forbid! Indeed He is my Lord; He has given me a good abode. Indeed the wrongdoers are not felicitous'* is extremely concise, hinting at the overall story of the attempted seduction. However, reflecting on the qualifiers used in it, the context in which it occurs, and the other aspects of the narrative as portrayed in the chapter, clarifies the actual situation and unveils the details of the matter.

## About Joseph

Joseph was a young child when the hand of fate brought him to the house of Potiphar bearing the marks of a slave. Perhaps he was only ever asked his name, and perhaps he only ever said: 'My name is Joseph', or it was said for him. Nothing of his language hinted at anything more than the fact that he had grown up among the Hebrews. No one asked of his home or lineage, for slaves have no homes, and it wasn't customary to record the lineage of slaves. He remained silent, his tongue sealed, speaking of nothing, though many stories existed within him. His lineage became known only years later when he mentioned to his fellow prison inmates, '*I follow the creed of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*' (12:38). His

deeply held belief in the oneness of God was revealed only to Potiphar's wife when she tried to seduce him and he exclaimed, '*God forbid! Indeed He is my Lord …*' (12:23).

On the day of his arrival in Potiphar's house, he remains silent, though his heart is full of what he sees as God's delicate craftsmanship. He remembers what his father, Prophet Jacob , had taught him about the essence of monotheism and the meaning of being a servant to God. He also recalls the dream's prophecy that God would save him, reunite him with his forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He has neither forgotten what his brothers did to him, nor the promise that God made to him in the depths of the well when all seemed lost: that he was under divine care and would eventually confront his brothers without them recognizing him.

Thus he was filled with feelings and completely absorbed in witnessing God's subtle blessings. He saw himself under God's guardianship, surrounded by His beautiful deeds, facing only good and encountering only beauty.

This very realization eased for him the adversities he encountered, and the constant trials and calamities that befell him. Despite their bitterness, he persevered, never complaining, never giving up hope, never losing his way. He mentioned this resilience to his brothers when he revealed his identity to them, saying, '*Indeed if one is Godwary and patient Allah does not waste the reward of the virtuous*' (12:90).

Joseph's attention was constantly drawn to the wondrous deeds of his Lord. His heart was engrossed in God's subtle signs. With each passing day, his love for God grew stronger as he witnessed the evident protection from his Lord, observing that God oversees every soul for its deeds and is a witness over everything. This divine love consumed him, and an overwhelming passion settled deep within him. His concern was solely for his Lord; nothing distracted him, nothing diverted him, not even for the blink of an eye. The chapter tells us more about this through his statements such as, *God forbid! Indeed He is my Lord …*, '*It is not for us to ascribe any partner to Allah*' (12:38), '*Sovereignty belongs only to Allah*' (12:40), *You are my guardian in this world and the Hereafter!* (12:101), and many other instances that we will explain below.

For Joseph, what prevailed above all else was a divine love that made him forget himself and occupied his mind constantly. The essence of his

being was pure, with a purity God reserved solely for Himself without allowing anyone else to partake in it.

But, when Joseph first arrived at the house of Potiphar, nothing was evident except that he was a young Hebrew boy now owned by this Egyptian nobleman. Yet, the nobleman's remark to his wife, *'Give him an honorable place. Maybe he will be useful to us, or we may adopt him as a son'*, reveals that he saw in Joseph a dignity and a nobility of spirit. He might have hoped to benefit from him or perhaps was drawn to Joseph's extraordinary beauty and grace.

## The Wife of Potiphar

The wife of Potiphar, a noble lady of Egypt, was instructed by her husband to ensure Joseph was treated with kindness and honor. She knew that her husband had certain hopes and aspirations related to Joseph. Thus, she made continuous efforts to treat Joseph with great respect and to improve his living conditions. Her concern for him was not like the concern one might have a servant that one owns, but rather as one would care for a treasured gem or a cherished child. She was drawn to him on account of his exceptional beauty and abundant virtues. As the days passed, her affection turned into deeper love, and when Joseph reached his prime, she could not control her feelings for him. Despite her aristocratic status and pride, and her known reputation for chastity and honor, she became infatuated, with this passion deeply rooted within her, taking over her heart.

Certainly, Joseph maintained a close association with her throughout their interactions, and there was no distance between them. She was a woman of stature, unswerving in her decisions, never retreating from her resolutions. In her eyes, she was the mistress, and Joseph was her servant, a possession. He had no choice but to obey and submit to her. The homes of royalty and the elite often deploy various strategies and schemes for their objectives; most means, no matter how challenging, become accessible to them. The wife of Potiphar was a woman of beauty and adornment. The harems of kings do not entertain unattractive women; only enchanting beauties with captivating charm are allowed.

It is customary to infer that these factors, all of which converged within the wife of the Egyptian nobleman Potiphar, ignited every passionate flame within her. They fanned every fire until she became utterly consumed by

her love for Joseph. Her infatuation was such that he became the centre of her universe; he was the first name on her lips when she spoke and ever-present in her thoughts when silent. Her sole concern and desire were for Joseph. Such is the allure of beauty, which can captivate hearts, and especially so when beheld continuously by the infatuated gaze of a lover.

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## Joseph and the Wife of Potiphar

The wife of Potiphar continuously nurtured the hope of a union with Joseph. She yearned to obtain what she sought from him. In their interactions, she would employ all the coquetry and allure typical of beautiful women, trying to seduce him with what she had, just as she was enticed by what he possessed. Perhaps what she perceived as Joseph's patience and silence further emboldened her intentions and enticements towards him.

Until, overwhelmed by her passion for him, she managed to isolate him in her house, having secured all the doors, leaving just the two of them inside. She had no doubt that Joseph would comply with her wishes. After all, she had always known him to be obedient and compliant. The prevailing circumstances seemed to assure her success in achieving her desires.

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There they were, a young man, enthralled by his feelings for God, and a woman, consumed by her infatuation for him, alone in a secluded house. She, consumed by her love for Joseph, wanted to divert his attention from his spiritual convictions to her desires. She relied on sealing the doors, tempting him, and banking on her authority and power. She commanded him with an imperative '*Come!*', hoping to overpower him and make him yield to her desires.

Joseph, however, was profoundly devoted to his Lord. His soul was purified, and no room was left in his heart for anything but his beloved Creator. He was in intimate communion with God, constantly witnessing His beauty and majesty. Worldly factors, despite their apparent influence, could not hold his focus. Unlike her, he was not enthralled by externalities.

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Potiphar's tried to persuade Joseph with all the means at her disposal, including by locking the doors to the house, adopting a seductive approach, and issuing commands. However, Joseph responded with, '*God forbid!*' Note, however, that he did not rebuke her with threats, nor did he say, 'I fear your husband' or "I cannot betray my master', nor did he invoke his prophetic lineage or purity. He did not express hope for God's rewards or

fear of His punishment. Had his heart been attached to any external factor, he would have mentioned it, especially in such a challenging situation, as is human nature.

Instead, Joseph clung to the principle of monotheism, seeking refuge in God alone. His heart was occupied by none but his Lord, and his gaze was fixated solely on Him. This is the pure monotheism to which divine love had guided him, overshadowing all externalities, even causing him to forget himself. He did not say, 'I seek refuge from you in God' or anything of that implication, but simply stated, '*God forbid!*' Therefore, there is a difference between his statement and the Virgin Mary's words to the spirit that appeared to her in human form: '*I seek the protection of the All-beneficent from you, should you be Godwary!*'

As for what he said to her next, '*Indeed He is my Lord; He has given me a good abode. Indeed the wrongdoers are not felicitous*', this elucidates his initial exclamation, '*God forbid!*' He states that the kindness he has experienced from her—referenced in Potiphar's command to, '*Give him an honorable place*'—is a blessing from his Lord. While this kindness might be attributed to her in some way, it's ultimately God to whom he turns and seeks refuge. Joseph refrains from her advances because committing such a sin would be a grave wrong, and wrongdoers never prosper.

Joseph's remark, '*Indeed He is my Lord*', underscores his monotheistic belief. He does not perceive the polytheistic concept of having multiple lords, as held by pagans who assign various deities to control different aspects of the world. Instead, Joseph asserts that God alone is his Lord, with none beside Him.

Second, it is evident that he is not among those who verbally profess the oneness of God yet associate others with Him in practice by attributing independence to these apparent causes which bring about their effects with God's permission. On the contrary, he perceives that the beautiful effects attributed to these causes are, in reality, attributed to God. Just as the wife of Potiphar believed that she had given Joseph and honorable place due to the wishes of Potiphar and that she and her husband took care of him, he believed it was God who truly provided for his good stay and that it was his Lord who managed his affairs. Thus, he sought refuge in Him.

Third, Joseph sought refuge in God from what she invited him to, as wrongdoing will not lead to success for those who indulge in it. They will

not be guided to happiness or find peace in the presence of their Lord, as God mentioned about his ancestor, Abraham: *Those who have faith and do not taint their faith with wrongdoing—for such there shall be safety, and they are the rightly guided* (6:82).

Fourth, he is under God's authority and dominion; he has no control in matters and cannot bring benefit or harm to himself unless God wills or desires it. Therefore, when she propositioned him, he did not straightforwardly decline but instead responded indirectly, saying: '*God forbid!*' Note that he did not say, 'I will not do as you command', or 'I will not commit such a sin', or 'I seek refuge in God from you', or any other similar phrases, seeking to avoid claiming any power and strength for himself and being wary of the defect of associating partners with God. The only exception is when he said, '*Indeed He is my Lord; He has given me a good abode* (aḥsana mathwāya)', in which he referred to himself twice, but only to affirm his dependence and emphasize his humility and need. By using the term *iḥsān* ('kindness') in reference to Potiphar's command to '*Give him an honorable place* (akrimī mathwā-hu)', by saying '*He has given me a good abode*', to convey the idea of personal respect and honor.

In summary, even though the incident appeared as a confrontation and struggle between the wife of Potiphar and Joseph on the surface, it was actually a tug-of-war between divine love and passion and mere worldly lust and infatuation, both pulling Joseph in their direction. However, God's word prevailed. Divine heavenly attraction took him, and divine love defended him, for God has command of His affair.

God's statement, *The woman in whose house he was solicited him*, indicates the root of her temptation. Mentioning that he was in her house implies that the circumstances were in her favor, making the temptation more intense for him. Similarly, the phrase, *She closed the doors* used an intensified form of the word 'close' (*ghallaqa*) to emphasize the extremity of her intention. Also, when she said, *'Come!!'* she used an authoritative tone, highlighting her perceived power and dominance, implying she had prepared everything for him and there was nothing standing between Joseph and her demand except his willingness to do so. However, God was closer to Joseph than his own self and closer than the wife of Potiphar, and all might belongs to God.

When Joseph said, *'God forbid! Indeed He is my Lord; He has given*

*me a good abode* ... this is his response to the wife of Potiphar, in which he counters her solicitation by seeking refuge in God. It is as if to say: 'I seek God's refuge from what you invite me to, because He is my Lord who took care of my affairs and gave me a good abode, and thereby making me fortunate and successful. If I were to commit this wrong, I would deviate from my success and remove myself from His guardianship.'

Notice how Joseph observed all the etiquette of servitude in this speech, as has been mentioned before. Firstly, he used the term of grandeur ('Allah'), and then referred to the attribute of Lordship, to signify that he does not worship any lord other than God, following the tradition of his forefathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Some commentators have posited that the pronoun in his statement, '*Indeed He is my Lord; He has given me a good abode*', refers to the matter at hand, meaning that Potiphar, my master (because he was the one who had purchased Joseph) has given me a good abode by instructing you to treat me honorably. Responding to your proposal would be betraying him, and I would never betray him.

Similar to this is the reading that the pronoun refers to Potiphar, with '*He is*...' being the subject and '...*my Lord*' being the predicate of the sentence, and '*He has given me a good abode*' is an additional predicate.

However, had this been the case, it would have been more appropriate to say, 'Indeed, betrayers are not felicitous', just as he said to the messenger while in prison: '*that he may know that I did not betray him in his absence, and that Allah does not further the schemes of the treacherous*' (12:52). Note that he did not say, 'I did not wrong him in his absence.'

However, Joseph would never consider Potiphar his 'Lord' (*rabb*). Even though people perceived him as a servant, he was a free man and not owned by him. He told one of his prison mates, '*Mention me to your master* (rabb)' (12:42). He told the king's messenger, '*Go back to your master* (rabb)' (12:51). He never referred to the king using the term 'my lord' as was their custom. He also said to the king's messenger, '*and ask him about the affair of women who cut their hands. My Lord is indeed well aware of their stratagems*'—wherein he acknowledges God as his Lord, in contrast to the messenger referring to the king as his lord. This interpretation is further supported by his statement in the following verse: *had he not beheld the proof of his Lord* (12:24).

وَلَقَدْ هَمَّتْ بِهِۦ ۖ وَهَمَّ بِهَا لَوْلَآ أَن رَّأَا۟ بُرْهَٰنَ رَبِّهِۦ ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ لِنَصْرِفَ عَنْهُ
ٱلسُّوٓءَ وَٱلْفَحْشَآءَ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا ٱلْمُخْلَصِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾

(12:24) She certainly made for him; and he would have made for her had he not beheld the proof of his Lord. So it was, that We might turn away from him all evil and indecency. He was indeed one of Our dedicated servants.

Understanding this verse requires us to thoroughly contemplate on the details of the story. Delving into the various perspectives, causes, and underlying conditions reveals that Joseph's escape from this situation was nothing short of miraculous, more resembling a vision than reality.

Indeed, Joseph, was a man, and it is within men's nature to be attracted to women. He was a young man at the peak of his youth, a time characterized by the fervor of passion and desire. In addition to this, he possessed extraordinary beauty that captivated people's minds and stole their hearts, such beauty and elegance naturally attracts temptation and indulgence. Living in luxury and comfort, surrounded by generous hospitality, he found himself in a setting that could easily lead to indulgence and excess. The queen, too, was exceptionally beautiful, as the wives of kings and nobles often are.

She was undoubtedly decked out in a manner that would enthral any heart. As a powerful aristocratic woman of Egypt, she was infatuated with him, a feeling that many would have also felt towards her. She had previously treated Joseph with kindness, generosity, and dignity, circumstances that can easily sway a person's judgements and mindset. She approached him, inviting him to submit to her desires. Resisting such advances is always challenging in itself. She tried to seduce him with all her allure and coquettishness. Her persistent attempts to draw him closer led her to tear his shirt, making it even harder for him to resist. A powerful woman, her wishes were rarely denied, and the man she sought was entrusted to her by her husband. They were in a lavish palace, characteristic of aristocratic residences, surrounded by breath-taking views that befitted such a luxurious life.

They were alone, with doors locked and curtains drawn. The threat of exposure or scandal was never far away, yet there was a perceived safety

given her status and her ability to conceal matters. This encounter wasn't a one-off opportunity; it could have been the key to a prolonged luxurious life for Joseph. By giving in to her, he could have secured many of life's aspirations, like power, honor, and wealth.

Such overwhelming temptations, if directed at a mountain, could shake it, and if faced by the most steadfast rock, could melt it. The only conceivable deterrents here were fear of the scandal being exposed, tarnishing Joseph's reputation, or betraying the trust of Potiphar. As for the fear of exposure, it has been mentioned that he felt safe from it. Even if any evidence did emerge, the noblewoman had the power to interpret it as she did when her advances were exposed. She almost convinced her husband when he discovered them, shifting the blame onto Joseph and resulting in his imprisonment.

As for the protection offered by noble lineage, had this been any deterrent whatsoever, it would have prevented Joseph's brothers from committing a deed far graver than adultery and far more sinful. Indeed, they were the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, just like Joseph, yet their noble lineage did not prevent them from plotting to kill him, from casting him into the depths of a well, from selling him as one sells slaves, and from causing their father, Prophet Jacob such anguish that he cried until his eyes turned white with grief.

Regarding the ugliness and prohibition of treachery, it belongs to the domain of social laws. The impact of these social laws is truly felt when violations are followed by appropriate consequences, especially when individuals are under the authority of an enforcing power and a just government. But if such authority is negligent or corrupt, if crimes are concealed from its view, or if they are outside its jurisdiction, then the effects of these laws diminish, as we will soon discuss.

Therefore, Joseph had nothing to shield him from these powerful temptations, except for the foundation of monotheism, which is belief in God. Alternatively, one might say it was the divine love that filled his existence and consumed his heart, leaving no space or even the smallest gap for anything else. This is what a reflection on the story reveals. Now, let's return to the verse at hand.

Consider God's words: *She certainly made for him; and he would have made for her had he not beheld the proof of his Lord. So it was, that We*

*might turn away from him all evil and indecency. He was indeed one of Our dedicated servants.* This clearly indicates the reason for Joseph's escape from this predicament. The context suggests that being saved from evil and indecency refers to his rescue from what was sought of him in terms of seduction and being alone with her. The phrase, *So it was* ... refers to the passage: *had he not beheld the proof of his Lord*.

Thus, the meaning of the phrase *So it was, that We might turn away from him all evil and indecency* ..., is that because he was one of God's devoted servants, God diverted evil and immorality away from him through what he witnessed in the *proof of his Lord* (burhān rabbi-hi). This vision of the proof of his Lord is the reason why God, in His perfection, averted evil and indecency from Joseph. Consequently, the implied outcome of *had he not beheld the proof of his Lord* would be that, had he not beheld it, he would have engaged in evil and indecency. This necessitates that the phrase *had he not beheld* serves as a restriction to the meaning of the phrase, *and he would have made for her*, implying that his inclination towards her, which mirrors her inclination towards him, pertains to the intention of committing a sin. Therefore, his inclination towards her falls under a conditional statement. Even though *had he not* is associated with a conditional statement, the grammarians have debated whether it is possible to place consequence before it in a manner analogous to the conditional particle 'if.' However, *and he would have made for her* is not actually a consequent, but rather is joined to the phrase *She certainly made for him* via a conjunction. This can be compared to when a person might say, 'By God, I will hit him if he hits me,' meaning, 'By God, if he hits me, I will hit him.'

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'By God, she certainly made for him and, by God, had he not seen the proof of his Lord, he would have made for her too and would have been on the verge of committing a sin.' Note that we would say, 'was on the verge of committing a sin', rather than 'he would have committed a sin', because the verb *hamm* ('to make for'), as mentioned, is only used when coupled with an obstacle. As God Almighty says, *They made for* (hammū) *what they could not achieve* (9:74), and *When two groups among you were about to lose courage* (hammat ... an tafshalā) (3:122), and as the poet al-Ṣakhr's says:

I desire (ahamm) a thing I cannot attain /
For an obstruction came between the caravan and its departure.

Had Joseph not seen the proof of his lord, the real act would be mere desire and approach without actual commission. God alludes to this when He says, *that We might turn away from him all evil and indecency*. He did not say: 'to turn him away from evil and indecency.' In other words, God turned the evil and indecency away from him. He did not turn him away from evil and indecency.

From this, it appears that the most appropriate explanation of the term 'evil' (*sū'*) is the desire for her and inclination towards her. While 'indecency' (*faḥshā'*) refers to committing the immoral act itself, which is adultery. So, Joseph neither committed the sin of adultery nor was on the verge of committing it. However, had God not shown him His proof, he would have desired her and perhaps been close to engaging in adultery. This interpretation is supported by our prior reflections and contemplations on the circumstances and factors present at that moment, which had a significant influence on him.

When God says, *She certainly made for him* ... (la-qad hammat bi-hi), He uses the *lām* of oaths for emphasis, meaning: 'I swear, she made for Joseph because of her desire for him ...' And the verb *hamm* only makes sense when the desire is accompanied by some form of action.

And when He says, *and he would have made for her had he not beheld the proof of his Lord*, this is joined to the preceding sentence where the *lām* is used for emphasis. The meaning is: 'And I swear, had he not seen the proof of his Lord, he would have made for her and would have been on the verge of submitting to her desires.;

The 'proof' (*burhān*) God refers to in this verse signifies the means by which a person attains such a level of certainty that it takes control of his heart like a miracle. As God says to Moses about his miracles, *These shall be two proofs from your Lord to Pharaoh and his elite* (28:32), and in reference to the Qur'an, *O mankind! Certainly a proof has come to you from your Lord* (4:174), and *What! Is there a god besides Allah? Say, 'Produce your proof, should you be truthful'* (27:64). Therefore, a *burhān* is a conclusive argument that clarifies the truth and leaves no doubt for the sceptic."

The Qur'an does not tell us what proof Joseph witnessed from his Lord. However, whatever it was undoubtedly served as a source of unwavering certainty for him—one that was not tainted by ignorance or misguidance in any way. This is indicated by Joseph's plea to his Lord, as will be

discussed below, *If You do not turn away their schemes from me, then I will incline towards them and become one of the senseless.* (12:33). This suggests that the knowledge he was endowed with wasn't merely the conventional understanding of good and evil, or benefits and harms. Such knowledge can, at times, coexist with error and sin. This is evident in God's saying: *Have you seen him who has taken his desire to be his god and whom Allah has led astray knowingly* (45:23) and *They impugned them—though they were convinced in their hearts—wrongfully and defiantly* (27:14).

The proof shown to him, which is the kind of evidence God reveals to His devoted servants, is a type of unveiled knowledge and witnessed certainty. When internalized, the human soul naturally adheres to this proof, and no longer inclines toward sin. We will elaborate on this further, below.

*So it was* (kadhālik)*, that We might turn away from him* (li-nuṣrif ʿan-hu) *all evil and indecency*—The *lām* in *li-nuṣrif* is either purposive or causative, but the meaning in both cases is one. *Kadhālik* is linked to *li-nuṣrif* and refers back to the previous statement about Joseph beholding the proof of his Lord. 'Evil' (*sū'*) here refers to whatever grieves the heart of a divine servant as a divine servant, which is any kind of sin or inclination towards sinning. 'Indecency' (*faḥshā'*) refers to the commission of vile acts such as adultery. And we have already discussed how the context suggests that '*evil*' and '*indecency*' refer to adultery and the inclination to engage in it.

Therefore, the meaning of this passage is: 'The purpose—or reason—for Joseph beholding the evidence from his Lord was to divert from him both the indecent act and the inclination towards it.'

A subtle aspect of the verse lies in the passage: *that We might turn away from him all evil and indecency*, implying that evil and indecency are being diverted away from Joseph, rather than him being diverted away from them. The latter would suggest that he possessed an inclination to commit such acts, needing to be diverted. This contradicts God's testament that Joseph was among His sincere and devoted servants, those whom God has chosen exclusively for Himself, such that nothing shares in their devotion. They do not obey anyone other than Him, whether it be a misguidance from Satan, a temptation of the soul, or any call that invites them to turn away from God Almighty.

As for the phrase, *He was indeed one of Our dedicated servants*, this

provides the rationale for His saying, *So it was, that We might turn away from him all evil and indecency*. The meaning is: 'We treated Joseph in this manner because he was one of Our devoted servants, and they receive such treatment.'

It is evident from the verse that it is the nature of the devoted servants of God to witness the proof of their Lord. And God, in His glory, wards off all evil and indecency from them, so they do not commit sins or even contemplate them, due to the signs that God shows them. This is the meaning of infallibility (*'iṣma*, or 'divine protection').

It is also evident that this proof is a certainty that is grounded in knowledge, but it is not a certainty derived from the conventional sciences to which we are accustomed.

There are various interpretations by both Shī'ī and Sunnī commentators regarding this verse:

Some say—citing Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid, Qatāda, 'Ikrima, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and others, mentioned that the meaning is that she desired to commit an immoral act with him, and he would have desired it too if not for seeing the proof of his Lord.

They described his contemplation, which is beneath the dignity of prophethood and outside the realm of sincerity, as approaching her until they were almost in a state of undress and engaging in carnal acts. However, the proof from his Lord arrived, nullifying his passion. In describing this proof, they presented differing accounts:

Al-Ghazālī, in his commentary on this chapter, writes: 'Scholars have disagreed regarding the nature of the proof (*burhān*) witnessed by Joseph. Some say that a bird landed on his shoulder and whispered in his ear, cautioning him. Another account says he saw a vision of his father Jacob biting his finger in distress, saying: "O Joseph, do you not see me?" Al-Ḥasan Al-Baṣrī mentioned that Joseph saw her covering something, and when he inquired, she responded that she was covering her idol's face out of shame. Joseph remarked that if she felt shame before an inanimate object, he should feel more shame before One who sees and knows all.

Another explanation says he heard a voice in his heart, calling out to him: 'O Joseph, your name is written in the register of the prophets, how is it then, that you wish to behave in the manner of the foolish?' Others say he saw a hand emerge from behind the wall bearing a warning about

adultery: *Do not approach fornication. It is indeed an indecency and an evil way* (17:32). Another says, "The ceiling opened up, and he saw a beautiful image saying, 'O Divinely protected messenger, do not do it, for you are under God's protection.' Another account suggests he lowered his gaze and saw on the ground written: *whoever commits evil shall be requited for it* (4:123). Another says an angel came and swept its wings across his back, and his desire left his body through the tips of his toes. Yet another account suggests he saw an angel in the room saying, "Am I not here?" Another says a barrier appeared between them, so neither could see the other. Another account mentions he saw one of the maidens of paradise and, dazzled by her beauty, asked her, "Who are you for?" She replied, "For those who do not commit adultery."

Another states: "A bird flew by him and called out, 'O Joseph, do not be hasty, for she has been made lawful for you and created for you.'" Another account mentions: "He saw the well into which his brothers had thrown him appear near his feet, and atop it stood an angel who said, 'O Joseph, have you forgotten this well?'" It was also said that: "He saw Zulaikha in an unsightly form, which caused him to flee from her." Another account claims that: "He saw a figure who said, 'O Joseph, look to your right.' When he looked, he saw a huge snake and was told, 'The adulterer will be inside me tomorrow.' Thus, he ran away from it."'

Among the narrations on this topic is one that states: 'Jacob appeared before him and struck him in the chest, driving out his desire through his fingertips.' This account was relayed by al-Suyūṭī in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, where it is attributed to Mujāhid, 'Ikrima, and Ibn Jubayr, among others, along with various other explanations that are derived from exegetical traditions.

The response to these narratives, in addition to the fact that Joseph was a prophet endowed with infallibility (*'iṣma*), which protected him from sin, is that the moral virtues and pure devotion that God described him as possessing leaves no doubt that he held a status far purer and loftier than what these narratives seem to suggest. God has described him as one of His devoted servants, chosen for His worship, granted wisdom and knowledge, skilled in the interpretation of dreams. He was a devout, patient servant of God, neither treacherous nor unjust nor ignorant. He was among the righteous, and God included him with his virtuous forefathers: Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob. How can such lofty stations and elevated ranks be attributed to someone unless he is pure at heart, sanctified in body, righteous in deeds, and upright in conduct?

As for those who believe that he intended to sin against God, they are asserting that Joseph was contemplating one of the gravest sins in God's religion—adultery, especially with a married woman, and betraying her husband, a man who had shown him the utmost kindness. Furthermore, these accounts suggest that he was persistent in his intent to carry out this sin until he had lain with her as a man does with a woman: He was undeterred by one divine sign after another and divinely reprimanded repeatedly and from every direction but felt neither shame nor hesitation until he was struck in his chest, and his desire was miraculously driven out through his fingertips. Or until he saw a massive snake to his right and was alarmed by it, fleeing in terror of what he witnessed. Such a person is hardly fit to be called a human, let alone to don the mantle of prophethood and divine messengership. How could God bestow such a person with His revelations, entrust to him the keys to His religion, grant him His wisdom and knowledge, and associate him with the likes of Abraham, God's confidante?

Yet, those who cling to such internally inconsistent narratives, accretions from Judeo-Christian sources, and fabricated traditions, also impugn the character of his grandfather Abraham concerning his wife Sarah. Therefore, it is no surprise that they level such accusations against his scion Joseph concerning another's wife.

In *al-Kashshāf*, al-Zamakhsharī writes: 'Joseph's making for her (*hamm*) were interpreted as him loosening his clothing, sitting in such a way as to be ready for carnal intimacy. It was also said that he undid the fastening of his trousers and sat, legs apart, with her lying on her back. The proof he beheld has been explained as him hearing a voice warning, "Beware of her!" But he paid no heed. He heard it again and still did not act on it. Then he heard for the third time, "Turn away from her!" Yet, he wasn't deterred until Jacob appeared to him, biting his fingers in vexation. Another account says Jacob struck his chest, causing his desire to flow out from his fingertips.

Some have also said: "Every son of Jacob had twelve children except for Joseph, who had eleven, because of what was reduced from his passion at that moment." Others have said: that a voice called out: "O Joseph, do

not be like the bird that once had feathers, but after committing adultery, sat featherless." Yet another narrative states that a hand appeared between them, without forearm or wrist, inscribed with the verse: *Indeed, there are over you watchers, noble writers* (82:10–11) He still did not turn away. Then he saw on it *Do not approach fornication. It is indeed an indecency and an evil way* (17:32). Still, he did not desist. Then he observed, *And beware of a day in which you will be brought back to Allah* (2:281). And yet, he still wasn't deterred. God then said to Gabriel, "Save My servant before he commits a sin!" Gabriel descended, saying, "O Joseph! Would you act foolishly while your name is inscribed in the register of the prophets?"

Another account claims Joseph saw the statue of Potiphar. Yet another says the woman moved towards an idol present there, covered it, and said, "I'm ashamed that it should see us." Joseph responded, "You're ashamed in front of one who neither hears nor sees, but aren't ashamed before the All-Hearing, All-Seeing, Knower of what's in the hearts?"

Such narratives and similar ones are from those who accept every narration and subscribe to predestination (*jabr*), whose religion is to attribute such falsehoods to God and His prophets. The proponents of divine justice and monotheism do not associate with such claims or narratives, praise be to God.

Had there been the slightest misstep by Joseph , it would have been held to account for it and his repentance and seeking of forgiveness mentioned. Just as the slips of Adam, and David, and Noah, and Job, and Jonah were all documented, alongside their repentance and supplication. And how could there be, when Joseph was praised by God and described as devoted and sincere?

Certainly, in that situation, he took a firm stance against temptation, striving against his inner desires with great determination and resolve. He reflected on the divine prohibitions and the inherent ugliness of the act until he earned God's praise, as revealed in the scriptures of earlier prophets and later in the Qur'an, which stands as a testament against all His other scriptures and confirms them. The Qur'an does not merely recount his story but dedicates an entire chapter to it, granting him the same worthy repute among posterity (*lisān al-ṣidq fī al-ākhirīn*, see 26:84), that was granted to his forefather, Abraham. Thus, the righteous would look up to him as a paragon of chastity, moral integrity, and steadfastness in face

of temptation until the end of time.

God has abased those who claimed that this chapter—which was sent down by God with the best of stories in the clear Arabic Qur'an so that people might follow the moral example of a prophet, one of God's messengers—depicts Joseph sitting between the legs of an adulteress, that he untied his waist cord to commit the act, and was dissuaded by his Lord on three occasions, being reprimanded clearly with the manifest verses of the Qur'an, accompanied by great admonition, severe threats, and the parable of a bird that loses its feathers when it tries to mate with another not of its kind, and remains frozen, unresponsive, and oblivious until God sends Gabriel to set things right. If the most shameless adulterer had faced even a fraction of what they claim, he would not have had a heartbeat left, nor would any of his limbs have moved. What an outrageous and clear deviation it is, then, to claim that Joseph was not dissuaded by any of these things!'

How aptly some exegetes have criticized those who held such a view. They defame him in this event, while everyone connected to it testified to his innocence. God Himself attests to this, saying: *He was indeed one of Our dedicated servants.* The witness from his household declared, '*But if his shirt is torn from behind, then she lies and he tells the truth*' (12:27), and the subsequent verses. Potiphar reprimanded his wife, saying, '*This is from you women's guile*' (12:28). Even Potiphar's wife eventually admitted, '*Now the truth has come to light! It was I who solicited him, and he is indeed telling the truth*' (12:51). The townswomen likewise exclaimed, *'Heaven be praised! We know of no evil in him.'* Joseph himself denies it, whom God has named truthful, stating, '*I did not betray him in his absence*' (12:52).

The primary reason they hold this view is twofold:

Firstly, their excessive reliance on traditions and their acceptance of any narrative, even if it contradicts the clear dictates of reason and the explicit texts of the Qur'an. They were beguiled by borrowings from the Judeo-Christian tradition and other fabricated stories that followed, which made them forget every truth and reality and turned them away from true knowledge.

Hence, you observe that they do not perceive religious knowledge as having any foundation beyond sensory experience, nor do they believe that profound human statuses like prophethood, sainthood, infallibility,

and sincerity have any basis other than mere conjecture and consideration. They equate these with imagined conceptual positions that only exist in the conventions of human society, positions that have no reality beyond mere naming and mental concepts.

Thus, they measure the souls of the noble prophets against those of ordinary men, which fluctuate according to their whims. Such souls, when mired in ignorance and baseness, can, at their best, only aspire to the most basic level of piety, seeking reward and fearing punishment. Often, they succeed, but they also err. If divine protection prevents them from wrongdoing in some situations, they understand it merely as a barrier between the individual and sin. This protection operates by nullifying all other human-instilled inclinations and forces, compelling the individual to do good. However, there is no beauty in an act, no merit in an action, and no praise for a person if everything is preordained or compelled. We will discuss this in more detail in a specialised study.

The second reason they hold this view pertains to the apparent meaning of God's saying: *She certainly made for him; and he would have made for her had he not beheld the proof of his Lord.* Based on what the grammarians have stated, the implied meaning of 'had he not' does not always precede its response. In this context, '*and he would have made for her*' is a complete statement, not conditioned by '*had he not*.' However, if this is the case, then the consequent of the conditional phrase, *had he not beheld the proof of his Lord* is 'he would have done so.' In which case, the meaning implied is that had Joseph not witnessed the sign from his Lord, he would have succumbed.

However, it is evident that such an interpretation is flawed. The two statements— *She certainly made for him* and *and he would have made for her*—are both the objects of oaths. The consequent to '*had he not*' is implied in the second statement. The structure of this is parallel to the expression: 'By God, I would have hit him had he hit me.'

Even though the suggested meaning is implied, it would have been clearer to say: 'And had he not seen the evidence of his Lord ...,' linking the statements. However, there is no overt contextual reason to suppose that they are separate statements.

Furthermore, among the interpretations of the verse is that what's meant by Joseph's inclination is a natural predisposition or the arousal of

innate desire. As explained by al-Zamakhsharī in his *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*:

'If one were to ask: "How is it permissible for a prophet of God to have an inclination towards sin or to intend it?" The answer is that his soul was inclined towards sexual gratification due to youthful desire and his nature leaned towards it in a way that resembled actual intent. Such an overpowering situation might overwhelm the minds and wills of some men. However, Joseph resisted these urges, looking instead to the proof of God, recalling the duty of the morally accountable to avoid forbidden things.

For this reason, you see them not regarding religious knowledge as having any basis beyond sensory perception. They do not see spiritual human statuses such as prophethood, guardianship, infallibility, and sincerity as having any foundation other than mere convention and mental abstraction. This perspective likens them to the symbolic statuses that circulate in human society, which have no grounded reality behind their names upon which one can rely.

Had this strong inclination, termed as *hamm* ('preoccupation')[1] due to its intensity, not existed, Joseph would not have been praised by God for his self-restraint. For the magnitude of patience during a trial is proportional to the intensity thereof. If his inclination towards her was as fixed as hers was upon him, God wouldn't have praised him as one of His 'dedicated' (*mukhliṣ*) servants.

It's possible that when God says, *and he would have made for her*, it means he was on the verge of desiring her, akin to someone saying, "I would have killed him had I not feared God", implying an approaching act without committing it.

Regarding the phrase, *had he not beheld the proof of his Lord*, one might ask: "Why consider the consequent implicit (that is, *had he not beheld the proof of his Lord* 'he would have done so') rather than explicitly stated (that is, *he would have made for her had he not* ...)?"

The answer is: The consequent cannot precede the hypothetical clause *had he not* (*law lā*), which functions as a conditional. The condition must always lead the sentence and, in conjunction with what's within it, forms a single unit. One cannot, according to the rules of Arabic grammar,

1 Translator's note: *Hamm* is translated in the verse as 'to make for', however, more broadly it can also be translated as 'preoccupation.'

rearrange parts of a sentence. However, leaving part of it implicit when a prior indication exists is possible.

If one were to ask: "Why does *had he not* only relate to *he would have made for her* and not to the entirety of the passage, *She certainly made for him, and he would have made for her*? After all, the object of the word *hamm* must be an idea (*maʿnā*) rather than a substance (*jawhar*). Intimacy requires two parties, so a more appropriate reading of the passage would be: 'They would have both inclined towards intimacy, were it not for a factor that prevented one of them.'"

The answer is: While God mentioned the *hamm* of both parties separately— *She certainly made for him, and he would have made for her*— making it necessary to understand the phrase as: 'She desired intimacy with him, and he desired intimacy with her'. The point is that each of them had their respective shares of desire, but it was Joseph who saw God's sign and refrained, making the phrase *had he not* ... correctly associated only with his desire.'

Al-Bayḍāwī summarized this in his commentary, saying: 'What is meant by his *hamm* ("making for her") is a natural inclination and a pull of desire, not a deliberate intent. Such inclinations are not subject to moral accountability. Instead, they merit praise and ample reward from God for those who restrain themselves from acting upon such inclinations or even approaching them. This is like saying, "I would have killed him, had I not feared God."

However, this argument contradicts the established linguistic meaning of the term *hamm*, which signifies intent to act, accompanied by certain revealing actions such as a movement towards the intended act or initiating some of its preliminaries. An example is when someone intends to hit another and moves towards him. However, a mere inclination of nature or the pull of carnal desires is not termed as *hamm* at all. According to its linguistic meaning, even *hamm*—let alone completing the act—is morally reprehensible and should not emanate from a divine prophet. Even though natural urges, being beyond the realm of obligation, cannot be considered morally blameworthy, neither can they be termed as *hamm*.

**Author's comment:** This explanation is only suitable as a response to those who claim that the Prophet Joseph's *hamm* refers to the inclination of nature and pull of carnal desires. It is not acceptable to suggest that by

*hamm*, the verse refers to a mere consideration or awareness of intent. The verse differentiates between the two types of intents. Her *hamm* refers to a deliberate approach to intimacy with him, while his *hamm* is his mere consideration of it without actual realization. The evidence for this is the divine description praising him excessively. If his *hamm* were genuinely deliberate towards intimacy with her, it would be a reprehensible act, unworthy of any praise. Thus, it's clear that his *hamm* on the part of Joseph was mere consideration, not actual intent.

Non-literal meanings for terms and phrases can only be considered when the literal interpretation is impossible. It has been established that the literal meaning of *hamm* in this context is perfectly plausible. What commentators have said about Joseph beholding *the proof of his Lord*, namely that it was an intellectual realization to refrain from religious prohibitions, does not accord with the text of the verse. 'Beholding' (*ru'ya*) is used either for physical sight or a profound spiritual realization, which is much clearer than mere intellectual reflection, which cannot be termed as 'seeing' at all.

Another explanation of the verse under discussion is that the two instances of the verb *hamm* ('to make for') differ in meaning. Her intent was to seduce him, while his was to strike her in self-defence. The evidence offered for distinguishing between the two different kinds of *hamm* is God saying that Joseph is among His devoted servants, along with the logical arguments for the infallibility of prophets.

For example, al-Ṭabrisī notes in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*: 'The apparent meaning of *hamm* in the verse presents a problem, because two people cannot make for one another without an act of intimacy resulting. When God says, *she made for him, and he would have made for her* ..., it associates *hamm* with both Joseph and the wife of Potiphar. Therefore, the verse indicates her resolving upon Joseph and Joseph resolving upon her, but it is impossible to 'resolve' on someone who is not likewise 'resolved' on you and not have the act transpire. Therefore, they must each be resolving on a different act, which the verse does not explicitly mention. With this in mind, it is possible for us to read the verse as saying that Joseph 'resolved' on something that was not immoral, such as striking her or pushing her away. As if to say: "She resolved to fornicate with him, and Joseph resolved to strike her or repel her", much like saying "I went for so-and-so", meaning in order to harm or hurt them.

Therefore, when God says that Joseph *beheld the proof of his Lord*, this means that God, in His glory, showed him a proof that if he acted upon what he intended, her family would either ruin him, kill him, or she would accuse him of pursuing her for immoral reasons and slander him by saying he propositioned her and then assaulted her for refusing his advances. When God says that He turned evil and the indecency away from Joseph , this refers to potential murder and the accusation that he had committed an indecent act. Therefore, the phrase can be interpreted as: 'had he not seen the proof from his Lord, he would have acted upon it.' The consequent to the phrase *had he not beheld the proof of his Lord* is omitted, in a fashion similar to the omission in the verse: *Were it not for Allah's grace and His mercy upon you, and that Allah is all-kind, all-merciful* (24:20).'

My response is that while there is nothing inherently wrong with such an explanation, it rests on distinguishing between two different kinds of *hamm* (one for Joseph and one for the wife of Potiphar), which goes against the apparent meaning of the text. Such a distinction should only be made when it's impossible to interpret them as having the same meaning, though we know that this is indeed possible in the case of the present verse.

This is in addition to the fact that this reading makes the *proof* he witnessed refer to the fact that if he struck here that would lead to his destruction or some other calamity befalling him. This, in turn, makes the intended meaning of *evil and indecency* murder and accusations, as al-Ṭabrisī states. However, such an explanation is clearly at odds from what the context indicates.

As for al-Ṭabrisī's argument in *Majmaʿ* that it is not possible for both parties to have made for one another without them engaging in the act itself and that, therefore, they must have each made to do something different to one another. The reason for this is that if we assume that the intention was made by one side, it cannot logically coexist with a similar intention from the other side. There is no meaning in having the desire relate to both the desired and the one being desired simultaneously desiring the one who desires them, without the act occurring.

However, there is nothing to say that both parties did not have the intention simultaneously if we assume they both acted at the same moment, without either one moving before the other. An analogy can be two individuals wanting to approach and meet: one might stay still while

the other approaches, or they might both approach and come closer at the same time, like two bodies being attracted to one another.

Another reading of the verse is that the term *hamm* in both cases refers to the intention to strike and defend. According to Rashīd Riḍā in *Tafsīr al-Manār*, when the wife of Potiphar attempted to seduce Joseph , and he resisted her advances, she became enraged and vengeful. She felt a mixture of passion, anger, and regret and intended to strike him for his defiance against her wishes. On the other hand, when he witnessed this, he prepared to defend himself and to retaliate if she harmed him. However, retaliating might lead to accusations that he had tried to force himself upon her. God, in His grace, showed him a sign, making him realize this and inspired him to choose the path of escape rather than confrontation. He headed for the house door to open it and escape from her, but she chased him, and they raced to the door.

Furthermore, such a reading argues that there is no basis for interpreting the term *hamm* here as an intent for intimate physical interaction in the verse: *She certainly made for him; and he would have made for her*. This is because *hamm* can only be realized through an action of the one who possesses the intention. And a woman's natural action in this context is not to initiate, but to accept or acquiesce to the one who seeks it from her. This is first.

Furthermore, Joseph did not seek such an act from Potiphar's wife, hence her acceptance of his supposed request, or her consent to permit him, cannot be termed as *hamm* for her. For the preceding and subsequent verses clearly exonerate him from even the precursor or initiation of such actions. This is second.

Now, were it to be posited that they both had such intentions, it would have been more appropriate for God to say: 'He made for her and she made for him,' given that the primary initiator in such circumstances is naturally the male, and the female intention depends on this and cannot occur without it. This is third.

It's evident from the narrative that this woman was resolute in her desire, without the slightest hesitation or obstacle. Thus, it makes no sense to say that she merely had a fleeting *hamm* towards him, even if we were to hypothetically accept that her intention was in response to his overtures. The term *hamm* suggests a tentative approach to an act. As for interpreting

*hamm* as her intention to physically chastise him, this makes more sense in the context. This is the fourth point.

My response to this is that Rashīd Riḍā's view agrees in its essence with the previous opinion about Joseph making for her in a non-carnal manner, and our refutation of the former applies to the latter. The assumption that her *hamm* towards him denotes her intention to strike him or the like has no evidentiary basis. Merely having such an incident in similar stories does not mandate interpreting the verse in this particular light without clear indicators in the text itself.

As for the claim that the word *hamm* in the verse *She certainly made for him* ... does not refer to her seeking to initiate intimacy with him, or the claim that such an interpretation is invalid, the arguments presented are rather weak. It's known that such intimate interactions typically consist of both actions and pauses, wherein a woman's role is active, not merely passive. If she intended for a kind of closeness with him that might awaken his natural carnal instincts and persuade him to reciprocate her desires, it's correct to say she *made for him* in terms of intimacy. It's not necessary to interpret her *hamm* as referring specifically to what she could receive in sexual intercourse, such that the broad meaning of *hamm* could not apply here.

Now let us turn to Rashīd Riḍā's final claim, that the wife of Potiphar was resolute and undeterred, and that, therefore, one cannot suggest that her intent was to initiate an act of intimacy with him. The problem with this view is that she was indeed determined in her desire for him and her resolve towards him. However, when it comes to the actual realization and occurrence of the act, it did not transpire—how? She saw Joseph's refusal and his dignified resistance to her advances. She became intent upon him when he rebuffed her. Yet, she had no certainty that he would ever reciprocate her advances or comply with what she wanted from him, and this is evident.

Yet another reading of the verse proposes a rearrangement of its structure and the insertion of implicit meanings. According to this reading, the verse means: 'She indeed made for him, and had he not seen the evidence of his Lord, he would have made for her too. But when he saw the evidence of his Lord, he did not make for her.' This is similar to sayings like, 'I would have perished if I had not found you', or 'I would have been killed if you

hadn;'t saved me' Even if neither perishing nor killing occurred, the meaning remains valid. An example from poetry:

'My people, do not leave me to an unpleasant day,
Even if I delay in striking or hasten forth.'

And in the Qur'an: *, and indeed she was about to divulge it had We not fortified her heart so that she might have faith* (Al-Ṭabrisī attributes this view to Abū Muslim, the commentator, in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*).

The issue with this statement is that if the intent of this explanation is to invoke what some exegetes have said about the textual arrangement of words and phrases in certain Qur'anic verses not corresponding to their syntactical order, they usually mean situations involving multiple sentences. Naturally, some of these sentences take precedence over others, and while the Qur'an might mention them later, it does not alter the natural order or meaning. This is similar to instances where several items are enumerated, and even though one might naturally precede the other, it is mentioned later in the Qur'an. Such sequencing is done without a specific emphasis on order, as seen in the verse: *His wife, standing by, laughed as We gave her the good news of Isaac, and of Jacob, after Isaac* (11:71). This is an instance of words not occurring in their syntactical order.

However, with regard to the present verse, *and he would have made for her had he not beheld the proof of his Lord*, this is not the case, as if the words and phrases are reordered, the meaning of the verse changes depending on which part is given syntactical priority. If *he ... made for her* is read as coming first syntactically, then 'to make for' (*hamm*) is unqualified, because this phrase cannot be qualified by *had he not* (*law lā*) when it precedes it, whereas if we read *had he not beheld the proof of his Lord* as having priority, then *made for her* is qualified by the conditional *law lā*.

If *he would have made for her* is supposed to be read as a consequent of *law lā*, even though it appears earlier, we would respond to this that the grammarians do not allow for such a reading based on the rules of conditionals the Arabic language, as they do not allow a consequent clause to precede a conditional one. The only way such a reading could be considered valid is if we are to assume that the exegete is disagreeing with the views of the classical grammarians, believing that there is no rational basis or valid evidence to support their understanding.

Another reading of the verse is what some have commentators have

proposed, namely that she was attracted to him in her dream and he to her because he saw her in his dream. Due to this, he realized that she was meant for him, hence he felt an attraction to her. Al-Ghazālī has said this in his commentary: 'This is a valid interpretation because the Prophets are infallible and do not pursue sins.'

My response to this is: If what he means is that the phrase *he would have made for her* refers to what Joseph saw in his dream, this is mere speculation without any textual evidence. If what he means is that Joseph saw her in his dream and was attracted to her in it, and from there believed she was meant for him, especially considering that the visions of the Prophets are divine revelations, and then he felt an attraction to her in the real world based on that belief, until he saw clear evidence from his Lord indicating his mistake, this would imply that Prophets can err in receiving revelation, and this is no less problematic than allowing the possibility that they commit sins.

Moreover, considering that in the previous verse Joseph considers such intimate relations outside of marriage as an act of wrongdoing whose doer will not prosper and seeks refuge in God from such an act, how can he have claimed that she was meant for him while simultaneously regarding it as an injustice and seeking refuge from it with God?

These are the main explanations given for the verse, and along with what was previously mentioned, there are about seven or eight views in total. It is evident that the precise meaning of *beheld the proof of his Lord* varies from one view to another. Some say that it refers to a tangible reason that Joseph witnessed, while others say that it refers to signs and phenomena that appeared to him in order to deter him from the sin: some say it was the knowledge of the divine prohibition on fornication and the punishment for it, others claim it denotes the virtue of chastity (*'iffa*), others say it referred to spiritual purity and divine infallibility. The reader is already aware of the correct understanding, and we shall return to this topic after finishing our study of the verses.

وَاسْتَبَقَا الْبَابَ وَقَدَّتْ قَمِيصَهُ مِنْ دُبُرٍ وَأَلْفَيَا سَيِّدَهَا لَدَى الْبَابِ ۚ قَالَتْ
مَا جَزَاءُ مَنْ أَرَادَ بِأَهْلِكَ سُوءًا إِلَّا أَنْ يُسْجَنَ أَوْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٥﴾

(12:25) They raced to the door (*istabaqā al-bāb*), and she tore his shirt from behind (*qaddat qamīṣa-hu min duburin*), and

> they ran into her husband at the door. She said, 'What is to be the requital of him who has evil intentions for your wife except imprisonment or a painful punishment?'

*Istibāq* ('racing') means to try to outrun one another, as previously discussed.

*Qadd* ('tear') means to rip or tear, and *qadd* means to tear lengthways, while *qaṭṭ* means to tear widthways.

*Dubur* ('behind') means the back or rear of a thing, as opposed to the front of it.

The context suggests that their race had two different motivations: Joseph wanted to open the door to escape from her and leave the house, while Potiphar's wife wanted to beat him to it to prevent him from opening the door and leaving, hoping to get what she desired from him. Even though Joseph reached the door first, she pulled his shirt from behind, tearing it. It tore lengthwise because he was in a state of fleeing, distancing himself from her; otherwise, it would not have torn that way.

***... and they ran into her husband*** **(alfayā sayyida-hā)** ***at the door—ilfā'*** (from whence *alfayā* is derived) literally means 'to find' someone or something. *Sayyid* (lit. 'master') refers to her spouse. Some have said that the Qur'an calls him her *sayyid* because that was the customary way in which Egyptian wives addressed their husbands—a practice that continued until the present day.

*She said, 'What is to be the requital of him who has evil intentions for your wife except imprisonment or a painful punishment?'* When they ran into her husband at the door, the situation transitioned from an intimate setting to a confrontational one. This change was triggered by the presence of the Potiphar, their presence together there, and the situation that unfolded. The passage begun by the phrase, *The woman in whose house he was solicited him ...* (12:23) extends across five verses.

Potiphar's wife began by accusing Joseph, asking her husband to punish him, implying that Joseph intended harm towards her. She said that her husband should either imprison him or subject him to a painful punishment. Yet, she never explicitly stated this or any details about the incident. Instead, she presented a general rule that anyone who intends harm towards another's wife should be punished, saying, *'What is to be the requital of him who has evil intentions for your wife except imprisonment or a painful*

*punishment?'* She never mentioned Joseph, herself, or the exact nature of the 'harm' (which was adultery) that was intended. This was out of respect for Potiphar and to maintain the decorum of the situation.

Nor did she did not specify the punishment, oscillating between imprisonment and a painful penalty. Her heart, filled with love for Joseph , did not allow her to be specific, for ambiguity offers some comfort. Her phrasing, '*for your wife*', suggests an attempt to provoke Potiphar and turn him against Joseph. This was a ruse to divert Potiphar's attention from her own guilt, making it easier for her to deflect blame onto Joseph.

قَالَ هِيَ رَاوَدَتْنِي عَنْ نَفْسِي ۚ وَشَهِدَ شَاهِدٌ مِنْ أَهْلِهَا إِنْ كَانَ قَمِيصُهُ قُدَّ مِنْ قُبُلٍ فَصَدَقَتْ وَهُوَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَإِنْ كَانَ قَمِيصُهُ قُدَّ مِنْ دُبُرٍ فَكَذَبَتْ وَهُوَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(12:26-27) He said, 'It was she who solicited me.' A witness of her own household testified: 'If his shirt is torn from the front, she tells the truth and he lies. But if his shirt is torn from behind, then she lies and he tells the truth.'

Joseph initially did not speak out of respect for Potiphar and in an effort to protect Potiphar's wife from blame. However, when she accused him of wrongdoing, he felt compelled to speak the truth, stating, *'It was she who solicited me.'* This declaration indicates restraint and control, emphasizing that he did not initiate any wrongdoing but rather, she was the one who tried to seduce him.

The fact that his statement appears without any particles to provide emphasis or show that he is swearing an oath is indicative of his calm and composed demeanor. He was neither ashamed, nor panicky, nor fawning when protesting his innocence against her accusations, for he had done nothing wrong. He wasn't afraid of her or of her accusations, and he had already sought refuge in his Lord when he exclaimed, '*God forbid!*.'

'Testified' is used here in the sense of the verb 'said'. So, there's no need to explicitly state the testimony before mentioning: '*If his shirt...*' Some commentators have said that since this statement conveyed the essence of the testimony, it was described with the term of bearing witness.

This witness pointed out a critical piece of evidence that would clarify

matters. The witness said, '*If his shirt is torn from the front, she tells the truth and he lies.*' This essentially indicates that one of them is telling the truth and the other is lying. If the shirt is torn from the front, it signifies a face-to-face struggle, suggesting he is at fault. Conversely, '*But if his shirt is torn from behind, then she lies and he tells the truth'*, indicating that he was fleeing from her, and she pursued and tried to pull him back, indicating she was at fault. This is obvious.

As for the identity of this witness, commentators have proposed various theories. Some say he was a wise man who advised Potiphar, as is reported by al-Ḥasan, Qatāda, and ʿIkrima. Others suggest that he was a male relative of the wife and was sitting with her husband at the door. Yet others assert that he wasn't a human or a jinn, but a unique creation by God, as cited from Mujāhid. However, this is contradicted by God's specific mention of '*from her own household*.'

According to traditions from the Household of the Prophet and some Sunnī sources, the witness was a baby from her family, still in his cradle. This will be further explored in discussions of the traditions.

What should be highlighted is that the evidence presented by this witness is logical and rational, pointing towards a conclusive judgement about one of the two parties. Typically, this kind of rational deliberation is not termed 'testimony' (*shahāda*) in the traditional sense of the word, as testimony is usually based on sensory perception or its equivalent, not on reflection or reasoning, as exemplified in the verses: *their hearing will bear witness against them and their sight and their skins* (41:20), and When the hypocrites come to you they say, *'We bear witness that you are indeed the messenger of Allah.'* (63:1). Even though confessing one's belief in prophethood should be based on intellectual reasoning, the term 'testimony' here signifies that they are expressing a known absolute truth without highlighting its rational or reflective nature—in other instances, this is expressed with the verb 'say' (*qawl*) or the like.

In fact, it is possible to read the phrase, *A witness ... testified* as indicating that this speaker spoke spontaneously, without contemplation or forethought, thereby rendering his statement a form of testimony (*shahāda*) in the sense that it was not based on reflection and reasoning, in contrast to the word *qawl* ('statement'), which conventionally denotes a deliberate or thoughtful utterance. This aligns with the narration suggesting that this

witness was an infant in the cradle; indeed, this might have been a kind of miraculous event through which God supported the claim of Joseph.

فَلَمَّا رَأَىٰ قَمِيصَهُ قُدَّ مِنْ دُبُرٍ قَالَ إِنَّهُ مِنْ كَيْدِكُنَّ ۖ إِنَّ كَيْدَكُنَّ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

(12:28) So when he saw that his shirt was torn from behind, he said, 'This is from you women's guile! Your guile is great indeed!

This means when Potiphar saw Joseph's shirt torn from the back, he said: 'This matter was a scheme of you womenfolk, surely your scheming is grand indeed!' In other words, he attributed this to women collectively, even though it was his wife's doing. This attributes the act to all women, suggesting that it emerged from his wife's nature as a woman, whose cunning is well-known and significant. Then he added, '*Your guile is great indeed*', implying that men are naturally attracted to women, and these women possess the means to allure men, captivating their hearts and ensnaring their spirits with their enchanting beauty and magical charms, diverting them toward their desires without the men even realizing. This guile involves meaning them harm. From the verse, Potiphar, upon witnessing Joseph's shirt torn from the back, took Joseph's side against his own wife.

يُوسُفُ أَعْرِضْ عَنْ هَٰذَا ۚ وَاسْتَغْفِرِي لِذَنبِكِ ۖ إِنَّكِ كُنتِ مِنَ الْخَاطِئِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(12:29) 'Joseph, let this matter alone, and you, woman, plead for forgiveness for your sin, for you have indeed been erring.'

This is Potiphar's statement. After taking Joseph's side against his wife, he advised Joseph to disregard the matter and instructed his wife to seek forgiveness for her transgression and wrongdoing.

*Joseph, let this matter alone* refers to the incident that took place, urging Joseph to overlook it, treat it as if it never happened, and to not speak of it to others. There's no indication in the verses that Joseph ever spoke of it to anyone, which is consistent with what we already know about him. For example, we see that when they were discovered by Potiphar, Joseph did not

accuse Potiphar's wife of making advances toward him until she accused him of seeking to harm her, at which point he spoke the truth. However, how could a flirtation, lasting for a significant time, during which she was completely infatuated with him to the point of losing all rationality and discretion, remain hidden? This wasn't a one-time or two-time event. The evidence for this is what will be mentioned later from the words of the other women of the city, *'The chieftain's wife has solicited her slave boy! He has captivated her love. Indeed we see her to be in manifest error.'*

'*... and you, woman, plead for forgiveness for your sin, for you have indeed been erring* (min al-khāti'īn)'—this confirms her guilt and instructs her to seek forgiveness from her Lord for that sin, because in doing so, she was among those who erred. That is why the masculine plural *khāti'īn* is used (as this encompasses both men and women) rather than the feminine plural *khāti'āt*.

All of this belongs to the speech of Potiphar, as indicated by the context, and not to the speech of the witness, because the judgement in this dispute fell to Potiphar and not the witness.

Some commentators mistakenly argue that the meaning of '*... and you, woman, plead for forgiveness for your sin*' is: 'ask your husband not to punish you for your wrongdoing.' They base this on the idea that the statement comes from the witness and not from Potiphar. Another explanation is that it means: 'Seek God's forgiveness for your sin and repent to Him. The sin was yours, not Joseph's.' And this is because the Egyptians still believed in God Almighty even while they also worshipped idols.

Indeed, the idolaters acknowledged God in His role as the Creator, but they only worshipped deities and lords other than Him. This topic has been discussed earlier in our commentary. Note, however, that in the verse her husband only commands her: '*plead for forgiveness for your sin*' without specifying from whom she should plead forgiveness, which in her faith would be whichever deity she worshipped.

Some have argued that the verse implies that Potiphar lacked jealousy, but the truth it points to is his deep love for his wife.

وَقَالَ نِسْوَةٌ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ امْرَأَتُ الْعَزِيزِ تُرَاوِدُ فَتَاهَا عَنْ نَفْسِهِ ۖ قَدْ شَغَفَهَا
حُبًّا ۖ إِنَّا لَنَرَاهَا فِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٣٠﴾

(12:30) Some of the townswomen (*niswatun fī al-madīna*) said, 'The chieftain's wife (*imra'at al-'azīz*) solicits (*turāwid*) her slave boy (*fatā-hā*)! He has captivated her love (*shaghafa-hā ḥubban*). Indeed we see her to be in manifest error.'

The verse initiates the story of the women of Egypt with Joseph in the house of Potiphar, which spans six verses.

Contemplating on these verses, keeping in mind the circumstances and the nature of the story, when the incident between Joseph and Potiphar's wife took place, news of this gradually spread throughout the city. The women, who were the city's elite, discussed it in their gatherings, taunting the wife of Potiphar, saying she was infatuated with the young man and had been overtaken by love, persistently trying to seduce him. They believed she was in clear error. This was a cunning move on their part, typical of the envy and pride found in many women's nature. A woman is often overwhelmed by delicate emotions and refined feelings. Her essence is adorned with beauty and grace, her heart captivated by allure. Such attributes, especially in young women, lead to conceitedness towards herself and envy towards others.

In sum, their talk of love and temptation was a ruse aimed at the wife of Potiphar, providing them some solace and alleviating the resentment they felt in their hearts towards her. They had not seen Joseph as she had, nor had they witnessed what she did. They simply speculated and made assumptions. However, first-hand experience is distinct from mere storytelling, and first-hand observations differ from hearsay.

The gossip about Joseph eventually became so widespread that it reached the wife of Potiphar's own ears. She, whose only concern was to have Joseph yield to her desires, cared little about her status or power; she only wished to make him love her in return. Recognizing the ladies' scheme against her, she invited them to a soiree, knowing they were the elite and noble women of the city, connected socially to Potiphar's household, and thus fit to be present at her gathering.

They prepared themselves, donning their most beautiful attire and ornaments, as was customary for such occasions among ladies of their rank. Each hoped to see Joseph and witness the charm that had so ensnared and exposed the wife of Potiphar. Her primary aim that day was to reveal them to Joseph so that they would understand her infatuation, thereby

diverting their attention from her indiscretions. She felt secure in her position over him, deeming herself his mistress and owner. She believed he held no interest in other women, and she recognized his resistance to such temptations in any case.

Once they arrived and settled, the atmosphere became amiable. As they chatted and negotiated, each was given a knife, and fruits were presented before them. At that moment, she ordered Joseph to appear, who until then had been hidden from their view. The moment they set eyes on him, they were so taken aback and astonished that they accidentally cut their hands instead of the fruit. Such is the nature of intense surprise and shock: when one is pulled strongly towards something they deeply desire or fear, they can become disoriented. Sometimes, they may rush towards danger or, in their shock, become paralysed, acting without intention. Such cases related to passionate love are numerous, and the tales of the behavior of infatuated lovers are well-known.

This difference between the wife of Potiphar and the other women was evident. Her infatuation with Joseph developed gradually. In contrast, the women of the city were suddenly exposed to his beauty, and their hearts were overwhelmed all at once. This sudden surge of affection disarmed them, disrupting their reason and discernment. They forgot about the fruit, inadvertently cutting their hands, discarding any restraint or patience. They outwardly displayed their intense love, exclaiming, '*Good heavens! This is not a human being! This is but a noble angel!*'

Furthermore, all of this occurred in the house of Potiphar, a place where utmost decorum and dignity were expected. They should have acted with caution and modesty. These women were noble, beautiful, and married, known for their modesty and chastity. All these factors should have restrained them from such open indiscretion. They hadn't forgotten their recent discussions, where they criticized and condemned the wife of Potiphar for her infatuation with Joseph, even though they had been living under the same roof for years.

Each of them should have been more cautious than to indulge in such behavior. They knew well the scandal and the reputational damage the wife Potiphar had suffered because of Joseph. And Joseph stood before them, hearing their words and observing their actions.

However, the beauty of Joseph that they witnessed was so astonishing

that it erased whatever opinions they had previously held. The setting, which should have been one of decorum and modesty, transformed into a vulgar celebration where attendees did not conceal their emotions or care about their appearance in front of others. Shortly after beholding him, they proclaimed, '*Good heavens! This is not a human being! This is but a noble angel!*' While not long before that, they had whispered to one another, *'The chieftain's wife has solicited her slave boy! He has captivated her love. Indeed we see her to be in manifest error.'*

The words they spoke upon beholding Joseph, after their initial criticism of Potiphar's wife, served as a kind of confession. The essence of this was that their earlier opprobrium of Potiphar's wife would have been valid if Joseph were merely human. Humans can be blamed and criticized when they succumb to desires for another human, especially when they could find satisfaction in an equally attractive alternative. However, when faced with unmatched—no, supernatural—beauty that weakens one's resolve and choice, one cannot be blamed for succumbing to its allure.

For this reason, the atmosphere of the gathering shifted abruptly. The bounds of modesty were broken as the women freely and openly discussed Joseph's attractiveness. Each spoke according to her innermost feelings about him. The wife of Potiphar declared, '*He is the one on whose account you blamed me. Certainly I did solicit him, but he was continent*' (12:32) She revealed a secret she had not previously admitted and threatened Joseph with imprisonment, both to maintain her status among the women of the city and in hope of securing his compliance, saying, '*and if he does not do what I bid him, surely he shall be imprisoned and be among the abased.*'

As for Joseph, he remained unaffected by the allure of these beautiful women, their captivating glances, their sweet talk, or the looming threat from the wife of Potiphar. Her turned fixed countenance upon the Beauty before which all other beauty fades and the Majesty before which all other might and dignity are abased. He neither engaged with them nor paid heed to the wife of Potiphar's words. Instead, he turned to his Lord, praying, "*'My Lord! The prison is dearer to me than to what they invite me. If You do not turn away their schemes from me, then I will incline towards them and become one of the senseless'* (12:33).

Comparing this plea to what he said to the wife of Potiphar during her initial seduction, *'God forbid! Indeed He is my Lord; He has given me*

*a good abode. Indeed the wrongdoers are not felicitous'*, it becomes evident that the situation described in these verses was far more challenging for Joseph. Where once he resisted the advances of just the wife of Potiphar, now he faced the collective desires and intrigues of all the women of the town. The prior event occurred privately, with her attempting to conceal it. Yet now, these women openly professed their love, tempting him and conspiring to seduce him. The collective pressure exerted on him at this moment was significantly more intense than anything he had faced before.

Therefore, Joseph fervently prayed to God to shield him from their plots. Previously, he merely sought God's protection. In response, God answered his prayers, diverting their schemes from him. Truly, He is the All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

Returning to the examination of the verses:

The term *niswa* refers to a group of women and, by mentioning they are *fī al-madīna* ('in the city'), it indicates that they were either significant in number or influence, enough to spread the scandal widely.

*Imra'at al-'azīz* ('the chieftain's wife') is the one in whose house Joseph resided and who tried to seduce him. The title *'azīz* is well-known in Arabic, and it was the epithet used for the master who purchased Joseph from the caravan. This title was also used for dignitaries in Egypt, and later, Joseph himself was given this title when he was put in charge of the granaries of the land.

The word *turāwid* ('solicits') indicates continuity and intensifies the meaning of seduction (*murāwada*). The term *fatā* ('slave boy') usually denotes a young man but, in this context, it refers to a servant. So prevalent was the term for a servant that it was specifically attributed to her with the phrase '*her slave boy*.'

Regarding the phrase, *shaghafa-hā ḥubban* ('he has captivated her love'), al-Rāghib writes in his *Mufradāt*:

> 'According to al-Ḥasan, this implies that passion reached the innermost part of her heart. Or, according to Abū 'Alī, the centre of her heart—and these two meanings are similar.'

Different interpretations suggest it refers to the enveloping layer of the heart. Therefore, the meaning of the verse is as follows: 'Several women of the city commented on the wife of Potiphar's behavior, and their words were influential in the society. They pointed out that it is unseemly for a

woman, especially a noblewoman like her, to try to seduce a man, let alone a servant. This behavior is generally expected of men, not women. As the wife of the chief, she should have been mindful of her household's honor, her husband's dignity, and her personal reputation. It is unbecoming of someone of her status to be infatuated with a foreign servant among her many servants. Her persistent attempts to seduce him, despite his refusals, were deemed reprehensible and a deviation from the path of good sense.'

Therefore, after saying, *'The chieftain's wife solicits her slave boy ...'*, they added: *'Indeed we see her to be in manifest error.'*

فَلَمَّا سَمِعَتْ بِمَكْرِهِنَّ أَرْسَلَتْ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَعْتَدَتْ لَهُنَّ مُتَّكَأً وَآتَتْ كُلَّ
وَاحِدَةٍ مِنْهُنَّ سِكِّينًا وَقَالَتِ اخْرُجْ عَلَيْهِنَّ ۖ فَلَمَّا رَأَيْنَهُ أَكْبَرْنَهُ
وَقَطَّعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ وَقُلْنَ حَاشَ لِلَّهِ مَا هَٰذَا بَشَرًا إِنْ هَٰذَا إِلَّا مَلَكٌ
كَرِيمٌ ﴿٣١﴾

(12:31) When she heard of their machinations (*makri-hinna*), she sent for them and arranged a repast, and gave each of them a knife, and said, 'Come out before them.' So when they saw him, they marvelled at him and cut their hands, and they said, 'Good heavens! This is not a human being! This is but a noble angel!'

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī writes: '*Makr* ('machinations') refers to a cunning stratagem to covertly achieve one's desires.' Therefore, labelling their gossip as a *makr* against the wife of Potiphar reflects that they intended to publicly shame her and diminish her dignity, and that, in this, they were motivated by jealousy and malice towards her. She summoned these women to display Joseph's beauty to them and to put them to the test she faced, hoping they would then refrain from blaming her and understand her infatuation.

Given this context, their statements are labelled as cunning, and the wife of Potiphar is described as 'hearing of' them because these statements emanated from them out of envy and a desire to disgrace her among the people.

Some scholars have said that their statement is described as a *makr* because they used it as a pretext to meet Joseph, having heard of his extraordinary beauty. They uttered these words so that the wife of Potiphar would

hear and then invite them over, hoping to present Joseph before them. This would justify her infatuation with him and perhaps offer them an opportunity to also attempt to seduce him. However, the first explanation seems more consistent with the context of the verses.

The meaning of the phrase, *she sent for them*, is clear: It means that she invited them to assemble in her presence.

*... and arranged a repast* (**aʿtaddat la-hunnā muttakaʾan**)*, and gave each of them a knife—Aʿtaddat* means that she made ready or set up, while *muttakaʾ* is the passive participle of the verb *ittikāʾ* ('to recline'). Here, it denotes something one reclines against, like a cushion or a chair, especially as was custom in the houses of the elite. Some have understood this as a reference to citrus fruit (*utruj*). As for the phrase, *and gave each of them a knife*, this implies that he provided each of them with a knife to cut and eat the fruit laid out in front of them, such as citrus or other similar fruits.

*... and said, 'Come out before them'*—indicates that the wife of Potiphar ordered Joseph to appear before them. The phrasing here suggests that he had been kept out of their sight until this point, but that he was somewhere in the house; perhaps in an adjoining room. Had he been outside the house, she would have said: 'Enter upon them' (*idkhil ʿalay-hinna*).

The narrative suggests that her soiree was a counter-strategy to the schemes of the womenfolk, to vindicate herself in their eyes. Her plan was well-executed: she prepared seating, gave each a knife, kept Joseph hidden, and then suddenly revealed him, hoping the shock of his striking beauty would catch them off guard. The climax of this plan was their accidental cutting of their hands, not just one or two of them, but all of them together.

*So when they saw him, they marvelled at him and cut their hands, and they said, 'Good heavens! This is not a human being! This is but a noble angel!'*—This encapsulates their captivation and awe and symbolizes their astonishment and loss of self-control. Furthermore, it aligns with the universal principle that the lesser yields to the greater. When one encounters overwhelming beauty or grandeur, it dominates their senses, pushing aside other thoughts and intentions, leading one to perform unintended acts.

Thus, when the women saw Joseph , the sight of him overwhelmed

their senses, causing them to cut their own hands instead of the fruit they had intended to cut. The form of the verb *qaṭṭaʿa* (with emphasis on the middle radical, *ṭ*) indicates the repetitive or excessive nature of the action, much like saying, 'The group was slaughtered ruthlessly' (*quttila*) or 'The drought killed them mercilessly' (*mawwata-hum*—in both cases, there is an emphasis on the middle radical of the verb; *t* in *quttila* and *w* in *mawwata*).

*... they said, 'Good heavens!* (hāsha li llāh)—this is a glorification of God concerning the matter of Joseph. This is akin to another verse, *'It is not for us to say such a thing. You are immaculate! This is a monstrous calumny!'* (24:16). It is a common style of speech amongst the eloquent that, when speaking about a matter that pertains to someone's exoneration or exaltation, they begin by magnifying and glorifying God, then proceed with what they wanted to say. Thus, when they wanted to exalt Joseph by saying, '*This is not a human being!*' they began by exalting God and then moved on to praising Joseph's beauty.

In their statement, '*This is not a human being! This is but a noble angel!*', they deny that Joseph could be a mortal man and declare him instead to be a blessed angel. This is based on the belief held by many, including the pagans, that angels are blessed beings, sources of all good and happiness in the world. From them emanates all life, knowledge, beauty, radiance, joy, and everything desirable. They embody both physical and moral beauty. When imagined, they are pictured as endowed with unparalleled beauty, and those who worship idols often envisage them in handsome, appealing human forms.

Perhaps this is why they said, *This is but a noble angel!*' They did not just describe him in terms of facial beauty or appealing appearance, even though what first affected them was his indeed his outward presence. Instead, they called him a '*noble angel*,' alluding to both his physical and moral beauty, and the beauty of his character and his appearance, both externally and internally.

The fact that this exclamation by the womenfolk comes before the wife of Potiphar said, *'He is the one on whose account you blamed me*', indicates that they did not understand that their words excused her love for and infatuation with Joseph. On the contrary, their words were a spontaneous expression of admiration, an induced revelation of their own attraction to and infatuation with him. And this indeed exposed them, and the wife of

Potiphar did not say, '*He is the one on whose account you blamed me*,' until after they had unintentionally exposed themselves both through their deeds (cutting their hands) and through their words (praising his beauty). Therefore, they had no choice but to acknowledge the truth of her statement and to excuse her actions.

قَالَتْ فَذَٰلِكُنَّ الَّذِي لُمْتُنَّنِي فِيهِ ۖ وَلَقَدْ رَاوَدْتُهُ عَن نَّفْسِهِ فَاسْتَعْصَمَ ۖ وَلَئِن لَّمْ يَفْعَلْ مَا آمُرُهُ لَيُسْجَنَنَّ وَلَيَكُونًا مِّنَ الصَّاغِرِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(12:32) She said, 'He is the one on whose account you blamed me. Certainly I did solicit him, but he was continent, and if he does not do what I bid him, surely he shall be imprisoned and be among the abased.'

This verse appears to anticipate a question from the audience, namely: 'What did Potiphar's wife say to these women when this happened?' *She said, 'He is the one on whose account you blamed me...'*

Her response was based on the prior words and actions of her guests. She pointed to Joseph, the one for whom she had been blamed, depicting him as the very person responsible for her actions, the direct answer to their accusations of her having forsaken her household's honor, her husband's dignity, and her own chastity because of her infatuation with him. The most powerful way to clarify an issue is to present the actual object of contention for all to see. A similar mode of expression can be found in the verses, *'Is this the one who speaks ill of your gods?'* (21:36), and '*Our Lord, it was they who led us astray...!*' (7:38).

Subsequently, she confessed that she had attempted to seduce Joseph, informing the women that she did solicit him, but also that he held onto his virtue and sought God's protection from such advances. She revealed to them what she had been concealing, especially when she saw their own hearts inclining towards him. She shared her frustrations with them, indicating to Joseph that she had not given up on him and that he should prepare himself to obey her wishes. This sentiment is encapsulated in her statement, '*Certainly I did solicit him, but he was continent ...*'

She then informed them of her determination to force Joseph into compliance with her wishes by outlining the consequences of his continued intractability. She stated, '*and if he does not do what I bid him, surely he shall*

*be imprisoned and be among the abased* (wa la-in lam yafʿal mā āmuru-hu la-yusjan-anna wa la-yakūnan min al-ṣāghirīn).' Note that her declaration is adorned with multiple linguistic devices, such as oaths and particles of emphasis (underlined above), to indicate her absolute determination. She implied that she possessed the means to force Joseph into compliance and that if he continued to disobey her, he should expect imprisonment after comfort and abasement after honor. Embedded within her words is a type of boastful warning directed towards the women who had previously gossiped about her, as well as a more direct threat to Joseph himself.

This threat, encapsulated in the passage, '*and if he does not do what I bid him, surely he shall be imprisoned and be among the abased,*' is even more severe than what she presented to her husband on the day she tried to seduce Joseph, where she stated, "'*What is to be the requital of him who has evil intentions for your wife except imprisonment or a painful punishment?*' (12:25)

The distinction between the two threats lies in her earlier equivocation between imprisonment and severe punishment, while here she combines both consequences—namely imprisonment along with humiliation.

Secondly, here she made the threat herself, not by appealing to her husband. Her words are those of someone who is determined and unwavering in their resolve. She demonstrated that she has control over her husband's heart, capable of directing him from what he wants to what she desires. Can she exert control over his affairs as she pleases?

قَالَ رَبِّ السِّجْنُ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِمَّا يَدْعُونَنِي إِلَيْهِ ۖ وَإِلَّا تَصْرِفْ عَنِّي
كَيْدَهُنَّ أَصْبُ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَكُنْ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

> (12:33) He said, 'My Lord! The prison is dearer to me than to what they invite me. If You do not turn away their schemes from me, then I will incline (*aṣbu*) towards them and become one of the senseless.'

Elaborating on the term *aṣbu* ('incline'), al-Rāghib writes: 'When someone inclines (*ṣabā*, *yaṣbū*, *sabwā*, and *sibwa*) they are driven by desire, as children (*ṣibyān*, which is derived from the same root) might be.'

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī writes that *ṣibwa* refers to 'the subtleties of desire.'

Potiphar's wife and the womenfolk were engaged in a conversation. They spoke together and elaborated their intentions, while Joseph stood before them as they tempted him. However, Joseph did not respond to them, nor did he address them, not even with a single word. Instead, he turned to his Lord, who possessed his heart entirely, with no room for anyone else and said, '*My Lord! The prison is dearer to me than to what they invite me ...*'

Note that his statement is not a plea for imprisonment or for God to shield him from their temptations by sending him to jail. Instead, it's a candid expression of his situation to his Lord. Due to his divine upbringing, he considered the hardship of prison preferable to the pleasure of sinning and distancing himself from God. His words mirror what he told Potiphar's wife when she was alone with him and tempted him, saying, *'God forbid! Indeed He is my Lord; He has given me a good abode. Indeed the wrongdoers are not felicitous'* (12:23) In both statements, there's a denunciation of sin and an affirmation of trust in God. The only difference is that in one, he addresses Potiphar's wife, and in the other, he speaks to his powerful and mighty Lord. However, neither of these statements is a supplication per se.

In his phrase, '*My Lord! The prison is dearer to me...*', he sets the stage for his subsequent words, '*If You do not turn away their schemes from me, then I will incline towards them ...*' which takes the form of a supplication that is expressed as a statement of his situation.

The verse's meaning is as follows: 'My Lord, if I were to have to choose between going to prison and what they call me to do, I would prefer to go to prison. I ask You to protect me from their schemes. If You do not shield me from their plots, I might be drawn to them and become one of the ignorant. The only protection I seek from their evil is through the knowledge You have granted me. Without Your guidance, I would be lost, falling into the pitfalls of desire and passion.'

The context of the verse, aided by its surrounding narrative, makes the following points clear:

First of all, when Joseph says, '*My Lord! The prison is dearer to me ...*' it is not a supplication by Joseph asking God to be imprisoned. Instead, it is a statement of his disposition, signifying his intention to turn away from the women attempting to seduce him and revert to God. The phrase '... *dearer to me* ...' means that he would prefer it over what they are trying to

entice him towards, given the choice. This does not imply that he found their invitation enticing for its own sake but only insofar as it appealed to the inherent human nature and the low self (*al-nafs al-ammāra*) that often incites to evil.

Furthermore, the verse, '*So his Lord answered him …*' (12:34) refers to the answer to his plea, specifically the part where he says, '*If You do not turn away their schemes from me …*'—this is further corroborated by the subsequent phrase, '*… and turned away their stratagems from him*.' Therefore, this was not a response to his plea to be imprisoned, as some mistakenly believe.

Evidence for this can also be found later, in the account of his imprisonment, where it says, *Then it appeared to them, after they had seen all the signs, that they should confine him for some time* (12:35). If Joseph had supplicated to God for imprisonment and God had decreed that for him, the wording and meaning would not have been framed in this way.

Secondly, what is apparent is that these women, like the wife of Potiphar, attempted to seduce Joseph and lure him towards them. Whether these women invited him to themselves, or to the wife of the Potiphar, or both—where the nobleman's wife invited him first, and then each woman privately tried to entice him—the verse remains silent. Yet, it can be inferred from his statement, '*If You do not turn away their schemes from me, then I will incline towards them …*' This suggests that if there weren't invitations from each of them, the obvious meaning of his potential inclination towards them would not make sense.

What substantiates this is the narrative of his conversation in prison with the king's messenger: '*Go back to your master, and ask him about the affair of women who cut their hands …*', continuing to where the wife of Potiphar confesses, *'Now the truth has come to light! It was I who solicited him, and he is indeed telling the truth'… 'that he may know that I did not betray him in his absence, and that Allah does not further the schemes of the treacherous*' (12:50-52). These verses suggest that these women invited him to the wife of Potiphar, and they were involved in the plot. Note that he says '*I did not betray him in his absence*' (singular) and neither simply '*I did not betray him*' or '*I did not betray him and others*.' Reflect upon this.

Nevertheless, it is highly improbable, given usual human behavior, that they witnessed something from him which astounded their senses and led

them to cut their hands, only to then to leave him alone completely. More typically, having been so affected, they would not have left that gathering without being deeply infatuated with him, consumed by thoughts of him day and night, willing to give anything and employ all means at their disposal to achieve their desires with him.

Therefore, it is apparent from what God has narrated about Joseph in His saying: '*My Lord! The prison is dearer to me than to what they invite me. If You do not turn away their schemes from me, then I will incline towards them ...*', that Joseph did not turn from addressing the women to a private supplication to his Lord, who knows his condition and hears his speech, except due to the extreme adversity he faced and the overwhelming trial and calamity that beset him on their account.

Third, the divine strength with which Joseph was fortified was something gradually bestowed upon him time and again by God, the Most Glorious. It was not something that was inherently present within him, or else there would have been no need for him to invoke God. That is why he expressed this as: '*If You do not* (present tense) *turn away their schemes from me ...*' rather than 'If you had not turned (past continuous tense) their schemes from me ...' Even if the conditional statement is timeless, its conjugation has certain implications about time.

It is for this reason that God says, *So his Lord answered him and turned away their stratagems from him.* Here, the repelling of the evil from him is attributed to a new divine action of answering Joseph's prayer and turning away the schemes of the womenfolk.

Fourth, this divine strength is in the realm of knowledge and thought. That is why Joseph said, '... *and become one of the senseless* (jāhilīn)' not 'I will become one of the wrongdoers (ẓālimīn)', as he told the wife of Potiphar: *Indeed the wrongdoers are not felicitous* (12:23) or 'I will become one of the treacherous (*khā'inīn*)', as he later tells the king: '*Allah does not further the schemes of the treacherous*' (12:52). Note that there is a clear distinction in his address between them and his Lord. He addressed them concerning the outward aspect of the matter, on the basis of their level of understanding, by saying that it is a sin and wrongdoers are not felicitous, or it is an act of treachery and God does not guide the plots of the treacherous. Yet he addressed his Lord concerning the true nature of the matter, which is that inclination towards them stems from ignorance.

The true nature of the situation concerning these two matters will be elaborated upon below, in a dedicated study on this topic.

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ فَصَرَفَ عَنْهُ كَيْدَهُنَّ ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٣٤﴾

(12:34) So his Lord answered him and turned away their stratagems from him. Indeed He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing.

This means that God responded to his plea to divert their schemes away from him when he said, '*If You do not turn away their schemes from me, then I will incline towards them …*', and he explains this by invoking His divine names, the All-hearing and the All-knowing, to show that He is indeed the One who hears His servants speech and who is aware of their condition.

## An Excursus on Religious Piety and its Degrees

### 1. Law, Noble Ethics, and Monotheism:

Law can only flourish through a faith that is guarded by noble ethics, and noble ethics are complete only through monotheistic belief. Monotheism is the root from which the tree of human happiness grows and branches into noble ethics. These branches produce good fruits in society. God says: *Have you not regarded how Allah has drawn a parable? A good word is like a good tree: its roots are steady and its branches are in the sky. It gives its fruit every season by the leave of its Lord. Allah draws these parables for mankind so that they may take admonition. And the parable of a bad word is that of a bad tree: uprooted from the ground, it has no stability* (14:26). In this verse, God depicts faith in him as a tree with a root, which is unquestionably monotheism, and branches, which are noble characteristics such as piety, chastity, knowledge, courage, justice, mercy, and the like thereof.

God also says: *To Him ascends the good word, and righteous conduct elevates it* (35:10). In this verse, he associates the felicity of ascending toward Him and closeness to Him with the good word, which is the true belief. The righteous deed that complements and enhances it is what elevates it in its ascent.

The explanation of this is as follows: It is evident that a person cannot achieve their potential nor find happiness in a life with no higher aim than happiness itself unless they are part of a community that cooperates

on the diverse tasks necessary for life. No single person can undertake all of these tasks alone.

This need for community is why humans must establish laws and regulations to protect the rights of individuals from negligence and corruption. Everyone can work to their fullest potential, and then they can exchange their contributions with one another so that each receives an result proportional to their effort and its value to society, without the powerful oppressing the weak or the weak being exploited by the powerful.

It is also a given that these laws and regulations will only be effective if they are backed by other punitive laws and measures. These laws threaten those who neglect their duties to society or infringe on the rights of others. They deter wrongdoers with consequences and, on the other hand, encourage and inspire everyone to do good deeds. They also ensure that a governing power enforces these laws fairly and justly.

These aspirations can only be realized if the force that enforces the laws of society is aware of crime and sufficiently powerful to subdue the one who commits it. However, if this force remains ignorant, allowing transgressions to occur out of its own negligence or oversight—a not uncommon occurrence in human societies—then there is no impediment to corruption and disorder in society. Laws do not possess physical hands by which to enforce themselves. Similarly, if the government becomes weak due to a lack of necessary force or laxity in its policies and actions, and criminals overshadow its authority or even overpower it, the laws of society will lose their significance and violations against people's rights become rampant. As has been discussed several times in earlier sections of this book, humans naturally lean toward benefiting themselves, even if they might harm others in the process.

This problem becomes more acute if such power is centralized in a single enforcing authority or a body that controls all affairs. This can weaken the populace, depriving them of the power to restore justice and rectify wrongs of their own accord. Such an entity becomes an uncontested and dominant force, whose power is unchallenged and whose will is unquestioned.

Recorded histories are replete with tales of tyrants and oppressors and their unjust dominion over people. And this phenomenon is plainly visible throughout many parts of the world today.

While laws and norms may be just in their very essence, and while penal codes may be severe, they will not function effectively in society nor close the door to crime and violations unless underpinned by virtuous human morals. Such morals should aim to eliminate oppression and corruption. This includes adhering to truth, respecting human dignity, advocating for justice, valuing life, and spreading compassion, among other noble traits.

Do not be deceived by what you observe in advanced nations—the apparent strength, order, and justice. Even if their laws are not founded on ethical bases, these nations operate on a collective mindset. Their individuals prioritize the benefit and well-being of the nation as a whole, pushing away anything that might harm their community. However, their primary concern for their own nation often translates into the exploitation of weaker nations, which is achieved through subjugating them, colonizing their lands, and violating their rights. This advancement and progress have merely shifted what past tyrants imposed on individuals to what present-day nations impose on other societies. The roles have changed: today's nation plays the role of yesterday's individual. Meanings of terms have been distorted: words like freedom, honor, justice, and virtue are now invoked, but often they allude to their very opposites—slavery, degradation, injustice, and vice.

In summary, laws and norms cannot safeguard against violations and losses unless they are founded on and supported by noble human ethics.

And morality or ethics, in its true essence, cannot bring happiness to society nor guide an individual toward righteous deeds unless it is anchored in the principle of monotheism. This principle is the belief that everything in the universe—including humankind—has one eternal God, from whom nothing is hidden. His power surpasses all creation, maintaining the most perfect order not out of need but because of His will. Eventually, He will summon all of His creation back to Him, rewarding the virtuous for their good deeds and punishing the wrongdoers for their transgressions. Based on their deeds, they will either enjoy eternal bliss or face perpetual torment.

It is evident that when morality is grounded in this belief system, an individual's primary concern becomes seeking God's approval in all actions. Godwariness (*taqwā*), then, acts as an internal deterrent against wrongdoing. Without morals being nurtured by the monotheistic belief, an individual's sole purpose in life would devolve into seeking the ephemeral

pleasures of this fleeting world and indulging in materialistic enjoyments. The utmost they could aspire to by adhering to societal rules and norms would be their own personal understanding that it is obligatory to abide by prevailing laws in order to prevent societal collapse or corruption. They might convince themselves that they should forsake some desires to sustain society, thereby gaining the residual benefits. People would then laud and praise them during their lifetime, or history might remember them in positive terms.

However, public admiration and recognition typically only extend to significant deeds that come to light. As for smaller acts, especially those hidden from the public eye, there is no guarantee they will be shielded from criticism or malice. And when it comes to lasting recognition and lofty praise, this usually demands a great sacrifice, such as dying for one's country, or investing time and money for the elevation of a nation, and such things are seldom sought after. Moreover, any gains from these sacrifices after departing this worldly life are, from this perspective, based on mere superstitious beliefs. After all, according to this view of the world, there is no life after death, and thus, no possible benefit from any posthumous praise or recognition. Would any rational individual favor others' joy by depriving themselves of their own without reaping any benefit as a result? Or would someone willingly choose death over life, if all they believe all that lies beyond this world is emptiness and nothingness? Superstitious beliefs tend to fade with the slightest awakening or reflection.

Certainly, it has become evident that such ideas cannot take the place of monotheism, nor can they deter a person from committing sins or violating norms and laws, especially when the action is naturally hidden from the eyes of other people. This is especially so when it is in the nature of the action that, if revealed, it would appear contrary to its true nature due to certain circumstances. This is like the modesty, which is portrayed as an act of aggression or harm, as previously depicted in the story of Joseph when he was tempted by Potiphar's wife. When he refused to betray Potiphar with his wife, he was falsely accused by her of trying to harm her. Nothing prevented him from doing this—and indeed nothing else is worthy of preventing him from doing this—save than the knowledge of his Lord's station.

**2. Religious piety is achieved through one of three ways:**

Or, if you prefer, you might: God is worshipped through one of three paths: fear (*khawf*), hope (*rajā'*), and love (*ḥubb*). As stated in the Qur'an (57:20): *Know that the life of this world is just play and diversion, and glitter, and mutual vainglory among you and covetousness for wealth and children—like the rain whose vegetation impresses the farmer; then it withers and you see it turn yellow, then it becomes chaff*... Thus, a believer must recognize the reality of this world: It is but a fleeting illusion, like a mirage that appears to be water to the thirsty. He must not make it the ultimate goal of his life's deeds, knowing that beyond it is the hereafter, where the outcome of his actions resides: severe punishment for wrongdoings, which he must fear, and God's forgiveness for righteous acts, which he should hope for, and God's pleasure which should be placed above his own self-satisfaction.

People differ in their inclination toward these three paths. The majority follow the path of fear, and every time they contemplate God's promised punishment for oppressors and sinners, their fear intensifies, driving them to worship God out of fear of His punishment. Others are primarily driven by hope. Every time they think of God's promise to the righteous—of blessings, honor, and a favorable outcome—their hope grows, and they increasingly practice piety and good deeds, desiring forgiveness and paradise.

A third group, the ones who truly know God, do not worship Him out of fear of punishment or in anticipation of a reward. They worship Him because He is worthy of worship. They know Him through attributes and names that befit His greatness, understanding that He is their Lord, controlling their existence, desires, contentment, and everything else, and that He alone governs all the affairs of reality. They see themselves as mere servants of His, and a servant's duty is to worship his Lord, prioritizing His wishes and desires over his own. They worship God, seeking His countenance in all their actions, whether through performance or abstention, without being distracted by fear of punishment or hope of reward. Even if they fear His punishment and hope for His mercy, this sentiment is reflected in the saying: 'I did not worship You out of fear of Your Hell, or for the desire of Your Paradise. Rather, I found You worthy of worship, so I worshipped You.'

When people subsume their own desires and wants in order to pursue the pleasure of their Lord and dedicate their actions toward seeking their ultimate goal, which is God, a divine love will blossom in their hearts. This

love stems from recognizing God through the ways He has made Himself known to them. He has identified Himself using the most beautiful names and described His essence with every attribute of perfection. It is innate to human nature to be drawn to beauty; thus, how could one not be attracted to Absolute Beauty? God proclaimed, *That is Allah, your Lord, there is no god except Him, the creator of all things; so worship Him* (6:102). He also said, *who perfected everything that He created* (32:7). These verses suggest that creation itself revolves around beauty, and that beauty and creation are inseparable. Moreover, God often reminds us through various verses that everything He created is a sign pointing to Him. Indeed, in the heavens and the earth are signs for those of understanding. There is nothing in existence that does not point to His presence or convey something of His beauty and majesty.

From the perspective of their creation and inherent beauty, all things point toward His endless beauty, proclaiming His praises and lauding His everlasting magnificence. Conversely, from the viewpoint of their limitations and needs, all things point to His absolute sufficiency, revering and glorifying His sanctity and grandeur. As God said, *There is not a thing but celebrates His praise* (17:44).

These individuals pursue an understanding of things by following the path that God has guided them to, recognizing these things as signs and indicators of His own beauty and majesty. These signs, in their essence and origin, merely reflect the infinite beauty that lies beyond, highlighting their own neediness and the encompassing nature of God's complete sufficiency, and the humility and dependence that contrasts with His supreme power and grandeur. One who reflects upon the universe from this perspective will inevitably feel an overwhelming attraction to the realm of divine greatness, with their heart immersed in spiritual love to such an extent that they forget themselves and everything else. Such a gaze purifies the soul, erasing personal desires and whims, replacing one's innermost being with a heart that is entirely devoted to God, as God mentioned, *but the faithful have a more ardent love for Allah* (2:165).

Hence, those who follow this spiritual path believe that the other two paths—worshipping God out of fear or worshipping Him in anticipation of rewards—are not truly free from associating partners with Him. Those who worship Him out of fear of His punishment are essentially seeking

His protection from that punishment, just as those who worship Him in hope of rewards seek His favor and honor, but not God Himself. In other words, if they could attain their desires without worshipping Him, they would not bother seeking knowledge of Him. As has been narrated from al-Ṣādiq: 'Is religion (*dīn*) anything other than love (*ḥubb*)?' And he also said in a tradition, 'Indeed, I worship Him out of love for Him, and this is a hidden station that can only be reached by the purified.' The true lovers of God are purified because they are devoid of selfish desires and materialistic tendencies. True sincerity in worship is only achieved through the path of love.

**3. How does love inspire devotion (*ikhlāṣ*)?**

Worshipping God out of fear of punishment motivates a person toward renunciation (*zuhd*), which is the practice asceticism in worldly matters in order to secure salvation in the hereafter. An ascetic tends to avoid prohibited actions or anything akin to them—meaning neglecting obligatory duties. On the other hand, worshipping God in hope of reward prompts one toward action, which is worshipping in this world through righteous deeds to attain blessings in the afterlife and paradise. Such a worshipper is inclined to fulfill obligatory duties or anything resembling them, i.e., refraining from the forbidden. Both these paths lead one to devotion to the religion, not to the Lord of the religion.

As for the love of God, it purifies the heart from attachments to anything other than Him, be it worldly allurements or its adornments, one's children, one's spouse, wealth, prestige, even one's own self with all its aspirations and desires. This love restricts one's heart to connect only with God and what is attributed to Him, be it a religion, a prophet, a saint, and everything that traces back to Him—because when you love someone, you naturally love everything associated with them.

Thus, a person who possesses this love prefers actions that are beloved to God and detests those that God disapproves of. He feels content with what pleases God and feels angered by what angers God. This love becomes the light illuminating their path of action. As God says, ... *he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people* ... (6:122). It becomes the spirit guiding them toward good deeds and righteous actions, as God says, *He has written faith into their*

*hearts and strengthened them with a spirit from Him* (58:22). The secret lies in the fact that only good and beauty emanate from such a person, and they avoid everything despicable and evil.

Regarding the observable universe and the events that unfold therein, when such a person gazes upon anything, be it significant or trivial, abundant or sparse, they cherish and appreciate it. This is because they perceive everything as pure signs that reveal, beyond their immediate appearance, an embodiment of absolute beauty and unparalleled charm, devoid of any flaws or aversion.

For this reason, such an individual is enveloped in God's blessings, experiencing joy without sorrow, pleasure without pain, and security without fear. Such negative feelings arise from beholding evil or anticipating harm. Those who see only goodness and beauty, and feel only what aligns with God's desires and contentment, are beyond sorrow, pain, or fear. Only God can grasp the extent of their sense of joy, security, and elation. Such matters are often too profound for ordinary souls to fathom, except through an imperfect mode of understanding.

This reality is alluded to in verses such as: *Look! The friends of Allah will indeed have no fear nor will they grieve. Those who have faith, and are Godwary* (10:62–3), and *Those who have faith and do not taint their faith with wrongdoing—for such there shall be safety, and they are the rightly guided* (6:82).

These are the individuals who are closest to God, having nothing obstructing their connection to Him, be it physical senses, illusions, personal whims, or satanic insinuations. Everything they perceive is a sign revealing the divine truth without any veil. They are endowed with the knowledge of certitude (*ʿilm al-yaqīn*). God unveils hidden realities beyond the comprehension of the physical eyes. This is indicated in verses like: *No indeed! The record of the pious is indeed in Illiyun. And what will show you what is Illiyun? It is a written record, witnessed by those brought near* (83:18-21), and " *No indeed! Were you to know with the knowledge of certitude, you would surely see hell* (102:5–6). Previous discussions on this topic can be found in our commentary on the verse, *O you who have faith! Take care of your own souls* (5:105).

In summary, these individuals truly rely on God, place their trust in Him, are content with His decree, and submit fully to His will. They

see only His goodness and beauty in all things, and hence their souls are imbued with noble qualities and virtues in line with this high level of monotheism. They are as devoted to God in their ethical values just as they are in their deeds. This is the essence of dedicating one's religion purely to God, as He has stated: *He is the Living One, there is no god except Him. So supplicate Him, putting exclusive faith in Him* (40:65).

**4. God's devotion (*ikhlāṣ*) toward His servant:**

This refers to what the servant finds within himself as devotion, which he then attributes to God. Indeed, the servant possesses nothing of himself except through God. God, in His majesty, is the owner of whatever spiritual blessings He grants the servant. Even devotion in one's faith—or, if you prefer, say: one's devotion toward God—is an act of divine grace by which God endows a person with that devotion toward Himself.

Indeed, here is a point to consider: God, in all His glory, created some of His servants with an upright nature and balanced temperament. They emerged from the beginning with sound minds, proper understanding, pure souls, and wholesome hearts. Due to their innate purity and integrity of soul, they acquired a level of devotion and sincerity that others might only achieve through effort and striving, yet even more profound and elevated due to their internal purity from the contamination of impediments and distractions. It appears that these individuals are the ones who are the *mukhlaṣūn* ('exclusive servants') to God as understood in the context of the Qur'an.

And these individuals are the prophets and the imāms. The Qur'an explicitly states that God chose them, meaning that He gathered them for Himself and purified them for His presence. God says, *We chose them and guided them to a straight path.* (6:87) and *He has chosen you and has not placed for you any obstacle in the religion* (22:78).

God endowed them with knowledge that serves as a shield against them committing sins or transgressions. Endowed with this knowledge, they abstain from every sin, whether minor or major. This characteristic distinguishes infallibility (*'iṣma*) from moral rectitude or righteousness (*'adāla*). While both prevent sinful actions, infallibility inherently prevents the contemplation of sins, unlike moral rectitude.

It has been established that a unique attribute of these special

individuals is that they possess knowledge from their Lord that others do not. God affirms this when He says, *Clear is Allah of whatever they allege, except Allah's exclusive servants* (37:160). The divine love inspires them to desire only what God desires, and thus they refrain from all kinds of transgressions. God reinforces this point with His account of Satan, saying, *He said, 'By Your might, I will surely pervert them, except Your exclusive servants among them'* (Sad: 83).

Evidence that infallibility is related to knowledge can be found in God's words addressing His Prophet, *Were it not for Allah's grace and His mercy on you, a group of them were bent on leading you astray; but they do not mislead anyone except themselves, and they cannot do you any harm. Allah has sent down to you the Book and wisdom, and He has taught you what you did not know, and great is Allah's grace upon you* (4:113). We have elaborated on the meaning of this verse in our commentary on *Sūrat al-Nisā'*.

Further, God recounts the words of Joseph, *He said, 'My Lord! The prison is dearer to me than to what they invite me. If You do not turn away their schemes from me, then I will incline toward them and become one of the senseless'* (12:33). We have explained how this verse points to this concept, above. From this, it is evident that this knowledge differs from other types in its practical impact. It decisively and consistently guides human beings away from what is inappropriate and toward what is appropriate, unlike other forms of knowledge, which might influence people in this manner probabilistically but not always decisively. God says, *They impugned them—though they were convinced in their hearts—wrongfully and defiantly* (27:14), *Have you seen him who has taken his desire to be his god and whom Allah has led astray knowingly* (45:23), and *But they did not differ except after knowledge had come to them, out of envy among themselves* (45:17).

Further evidence for this can be found in the verse: *Clear is Allah of whatever they allege, except Allah's exclusive servants* (37:160). These exclusive servants from the ranks of the Prophets and Imāms have clarified for us the sum of knowledge related to His exalted names and attributes through revelation. We have also attained this knowledge through rational proofs. Yet, the verse emphasizes God's transcendence beyond any description we might give Him, except for those descriptions provided by these devoted servants. Thus, one form of knowledge does not equate to another, even if they both pertain to the same subject.

Secondly, this knowledge (*ʿilm*)—referring to the grace of infallibility (*ʿiṣma*)—does not alter the human being's inherent nature in his voluntary actions nor does it push him into the realm of compulsion and predestination. How is this? Knowledge is fundamentally a product of choice, and merely possessing knowledge does not necessitate a strong will. For instance, if someone who cares to preserve his own wellbeing is certain that a liquid is a lethal poison, they will undoubtedly avoid drinking it of their own free will. An actor is only compelled when they are forced to choose one of two equally possible options, leading to one becoming impossible for them.

Evidence for this includes the verse: *We chose them and guided them to a straight path. That is Allah's guidance: with it He guides whomever He wishes of His servants. But were they to ascribe any partners (to Allah), what they used to do would not avail them* (6:88). This verse implies that they still have the capability to associate partners with God, even though divine selection and guidance prevent them from doing so. Another verse states: *O Messenger! Communicate that which has been sent down to you from your Lord, and if you do not, you will not have communicated His message* (5:67), among other verses.

The infallible human refrains from committing sins by their own accord, choice, and free will. This aversion to sin due to their infallibility is analogous to the divine favor that ordinary individuals receive to assist them in abstaining from sins.

Furthermore, this does not contradict what is indicated in God's words and explicitly mentioned in traditions, namely that Prophets and Imāms are divinely guided by the Holy Spirit *(rūh al-qudus*). Relating to the Holy Spirit is like attributing the guidance of a believer to the spirit of faith and attributing a person's misguidance to the influence of the devil. Nevertheless, none of this removes the act from being a result of the actor's choice and will. Understand this well.

There are some theologians who claim that God only diverts a person from sin not through their own choice and volition but by intervening in the natural causes, imbuing them with a will, sending an angel to resist a person's will, preventing its influence, or diverting it from its natural course. This is like a strong person preventing a weaker one from doing something that is in their nature to do.

Some of these scholars, even though they incline toward determinism, share a common foundation with one another, upon which they base their worldview. They believe that things require God, the True Creator, only in their inception. Once these things come into existence, they no longer need Him. He, in His transcendence, plays a role in the sequence of causality. However, being the most powerful and dominant over all, He has the authority to intervene in matters of existence, whether to prevent or permit, give life or cause death, heal or inflict illness, grant abundance or restrict, and so forth, by His supreme power.

If God desires to divert a servant from evil, for instance, He might send an angel to challenge the individual's natural inclinations, altering their will from evil to good. Conversely, if God wishes to mislead a servant due to their deserving of such a fate, He might allow Satan to influence them, turning them from good to evil, but not in a manner that necessitates complete compulsion.

This view is countered by our own direct experiences of reality as human beings. When we observe our own actions, whether these are good or evil, it is evident that there isn't any external force contending with us or threatening to overpower us beyond our own selves. We perform our actions based on our feelings and a choice that emerges from these feelings. Thus, whatever is established by our senses and reason concerning external influences on our souls, such as angels or devils, is a longitudinal cause and not a transversal one, and this is clear.

Furthermore, the Qur'anic teachings on monotheism and its attendant doctrines refutes this viewpoint at its core. A substantial portion of this has already been examined in earlier discussions.

## Examining Narrations

(1) Shaykh al-Ṣadūq reports in *Maʿānī al-Akhbār* from Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī from Imām al-Sajjād, in a narration that we already began to examine in the previous section:
'Joseph was among the most beautiful people of his time. When Joseph reached adolescence, the wife of the king sought to seduce him, but he said, "God forbid, we, the people of the house, do not commit adultery." She locked the doors and said, "Do not be afraid!" Then she threw herself at him. Joseph escaped and ran

toward the door. She chased him and pulled his shirt from behind, tearing it off. Joseph escaped from her in his clothes. When they encountered her husband at the door, she said, "What is the punishment for someone who intended harm to your household? Shouldn't it be imprisonment or a painful punishment?"

The king intended to punish Joseph, but Joseph said, "I didn't intend any harm to your household. She sought to seduce me. Just ask this young boy who had tried to seduce the other. God made the boy speak to resolve the matter. He said, "O King, look at Joseph's shirt. If it is torn from the front, he is the one who seduced her, and if it is torn from the back, she is the one who seduced him."

When the king heard the boy's words, he was greatly alarmed. He looked at the shirt, and when he saw it torn from the back, he said to her, "This is from your guile! Your guile is great indeed!" He told Joseph: "Let this matter alone and not to let anyone hear about it from you." However, Joseph did not keep it a secret and spread it throughout the city. The women of the city began to say, "The chieftain's wife solicits her slave boy!" When she heard this, she invited them, prepared food for them, and gave each of them a knife. Then she told Joseph to come out to them. When they saw him, they praised him and cut their hands. The women left, and each of them secretly sent a message to Joseph, asking to visit him. He refused and said, " If You do not turn away their schemes from me, then I will incline toward them and become one of the senseless." But God turned away their plot.

When the matter of Joseph, the nobleman's wife, and the women became known in Egypt, the king decided to imprison Joseph after hearing the boy's words. So, he was put in prison. Two young men were imprisoned with Joseph, and their story and Joseph's story is what God has narrated in the Qur'an.' Abū Ḥamza said, 'Then the narration of ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn ended.'

**Author's comment:** In his *Tafsīr*, al-ʿAyyāshī narrates a tradition with the same meaning from Abū Ḥamza with slight differences. In his version, "God forbid, we, the people of the house, do not commit adultery" is an explanatory gloss which is inserted beside verse, *Indeed He is my Lord; He*

*has given me a good abode* (12:23). This supports what we have said regarding the verse, namely that the pronoun refers to God, not to Potiphar, as most commentators have suggested. Understand this.

Furthermore, when the Imām says, 'He refused and said, "*If you do not turn away* ..."', this shows that he did not consider Joseph's statement, '*My Lord! The prison is dearer to me than to what they invite me*' (12:33) a kind of supplication, which is also consistent with what we have previously said about the verse.

(2) In *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, it is reported from Ḥamdān, from 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Jahm: 'I attended a salon (*majlis*) of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn and with him was 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā. Al-Ma'mūn said to him, "O son of the Messenger of God, do you not assert that the prophets are infallible?" He said, "Yes." Then the discussion continued until the Caliph said, "Then inform me about the meaning of God's saying, *She certainly made for him; and he would have made for her had he not beheld the proof of his Lord.*" Al-Riḍā said: "She certainly made for him, and had he not seen the proof of his Lord, he would have certainly made for her, but he was infallible, and the infallible neither intends to commit a sin nor does he commit one."

Surely my father told me from his father al-Ṣādiq that he said, "She made to do it, and he made not to do it." Al-Ma'mun said, "May God bless you, O Abū al-Ḥasan!"'

**Author's comment:** We have previously mentioned that this Ibn al-Jahm is not without issue when it comes to the reliability of his narrations. However, what al-Riḍā says at the beginning of the narration is consistent with what we have previously explained with regards to this verse. As for what he narrated from his grandfather Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, 'She made to do it, and he made not to do it,' perhaps the intended meaning is what Imām al-Riḍā had already mentioned, and this is an example of him applying this tradition to it. Or perhaps the intended meaning is that he made to kill her, as the following narration supports, which is consistent with some of the previous possible explanations of the verse.

(3) In *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, it is reported from Abū al-Ṣilt al-Harawī, who said: 'When the Caliph al-Ma'mūn gathered for 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā the people of different theological schools from among the

Muslims, and from representatives of different religions, including Jews, Christians, Magians, Sabians, and all the people who espoused different doctrines, no one stood up except that ʿAlī b. Mūsā had soundly defeated his argument, and the representative stood there dumbfounded, as if he had fed him a stone.

ʿAlī b. Muḥammad b. al-Jahm stood up to him and said, "O son of the Messenger of God, do you say that the prophets are infallible?" He said, "Yes." He said to him, "So what do you say about His saying about Joseph, *She certainly made for him; and he would have made for* her?" ʿAlī al-Riḍā said to him, "As for His saying, the Exalted, about Joseph, *She certainly made for him; and he would have made for her had he not beheld the proof of his Lord*, she intended to commit a sin, but Joseph intended to kill her if she forced him to do what she wanted him to do. So, God turned away from him killing her and from immorality. This is His saying, the Mighty and Majestic, *So it was, that We might turn away from him all evil and indecency. He was indeed one of Our dedicated servants.* And evil refers to killing, while indecency is adultery."'

(4) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī reports from Abū Naʿīm, who reported in his *Hilya* from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib about the verse, *She certainly made for him; and he would have made for her*: 'She desired him, and he desired her, and his desire was that he intended to unbuckle his belt. So, she went to an idol adorned with pearls and rubies in a corner of the house. She covered it with a white cloth between her and it. He asked, "What are you doing?" She said, "I am ashamed before my god to see me in this state." So, Joseph said, "You are ashamed of an idol that does not eat or drink, and I am not ashamed before my God, who is aware of every soul for what it has earned?" Then he said, "You will never get it from me." And this is the proof that he saw.'

**Author's comment:** This narration is fabricated. How can it be otherwise? The speech of Imām ʿAlī and of all of the Imāms of the Prophet's Household is replete with discussions about the infallibility of the prophets, and their doctrine in this regard is well known.

Moreover, her covering the idol, his reaction to this, and the argument he made to her is not called beholding the proof of his Lord. This idea has

been mentioned in several narrations from the Prophet's Household, but these are solitary reports and, as such, they cannot be relied upon. Yes, it is not unlikely that the woman would go to cover an idol that was there, so Joseph's self would be drawn to witnessing the signs of monotheism at that, so the veil between him and the field of divine majesty would be lifted, and he would see what would turn him away from all evil and immorality, as he had before. And God has said about him, *He was indeed one of Our dedicated servants.* If anything from these narrations is correct, let this be its meaning.

(5) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Abū al-Shaykh reports from Ibn ʿAbbās: 'Joseph stumbled three times: when he made for her, so he was imprisoned; when he said, "*Mention me to your master*", so he stayed in prison for several years, and Satan made him forget the remembrance of his Lord; And when he said, "*You are indeed thieves!*" (12:70), they said "*If he has stolen; a brother of his had stolen before*" (12:77).

**Author's comment:** This narration contradicts the explicit words of God, where He mentions that He chose him and made him exclusively for Himself, and that Satan has no way to those whom God has made exclusively for Himself. How can it be correct for someone who intended the worst sin, and Satan made him forget the mention of his Lord, then he lied in his statement so God punished him with prison, then with staying in it for several years, and accused him of theft, that God would consider him a truthful one of His chosen and beneficent servants, and mention that He gave him authority and knowledge, chose him, and completed His favor upon him? There are many weak narrations of this kind that al-Suyūṭī has reported in *al-Durr Al-Manthūr*, and some of them have been previously transmitted when clarifying the verses—nothing from them can be relied upon.

(6) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cites Aḥmad, Ibn Jarīr, and al-Bayhaqī's *Dalā'il*, who report from Ibn ʿAbbās, from the Prophet (s.a.w.): 'Four spoke while they were infants: the son of Māshiṭa the Pharaoh's daughter, Joseph's witness, the companion of the wounded one, and Jesus son of Mary.'

(7) In the *Tafsīr* of al-Qummī, he narrates from Abū al-Jārūd from Abū Jaʿfar, about the verse: *He has captivated her love*: 'Her love

for him veiled her from the people, so she did not understand anything other than him, and the veil is passion, and passion is the veil of the heart.'

(8) In the same source, in a narration about the gathering of the women and their cutting their hands, he said: 'Joseph did not end that day until every woman who saw him sent a message to him, inviting him to come to her. Joseph was annoyed that day and said, "*My Lord! The prison is dearer to me than to what they invite me. If You do not turn away their schemes from me, then I will incline toward them and become one of the senseless*" (12:33). Therefore, his Lord responded to him and turned away from him their plot.'

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## Verses 35–42

The verses contain the next segment of Prophet Joseph's story, particularly his imprisonment and his confinement therein for several years. This serves as a prelude to gaining favor with the king and his eventual rise to power in Egypt. The verses also show how he preached monotheism while in prison and presented it in a remarkable manner. For the first time, it is revealed that he belongs to the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

ثُمَّ بَدَا لَهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا رَأَوُا الْآيَاتِ لَيَسْجُنُنَّهُ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٣٥﴾

(12:35) Then it appeared to them (*badā la-hum*), after they had seen all the signs, that they should confine him for some time.

*Badā'* refers to a new perspective or opinion arising after a certain event. *To them* refers to Potiphar, his wife, and their close associates who were privy to the situation. The *signs* refer to the evidence and proof that affirmed Joseph's innocence and continence. This includes the testimony of the young boy, the shirt torn from the back, and their simultaneous arrival at the door. It may also include the women cutting their hands upon seeing him, his refusal to yield to their advances, and Potiphar's wife confessing to them that she had indeed tried to seduce him.

*... that they should confine him* (la-yasjununna-hu) *for some time*— The *lām* in *la-yasjununna* is for the swearing of an oath, which explains what new opinion occurred to them. *For some time* is connected to this, and it suggests a period of waiting. The meaning is thus that they resolved to imprison him until the widespread rumors of seduction in the city died down and were forgotten by the people.

The verse's meaning, then, is that after witnessing these signs that affirmed Joseph's innocence and purity, Potiphar, his wife, and their advisers arrived at a new decision: to imprison Joseph for some time until the scandalous rumors circulating in the city were forgotten. They swore together to do this.

This indicates that their decision was made in the interest of Potiphar's household, to protect his family from the disgrace and shame of the

accusation. They may have also intended to maintain public safety, preventing people, especially women, from being tempted by Joseph's beauty. The beauty that captivated the nobleman's wife and the noble ladies of the city and caused them to react as they did was likely to cause chaos in the city.

However, Joseph's statement in prison to the king's messenger, *'Go back to your master, and ask him about the affair of women who cut their hands ...'* (12:50), and the subsequent dialogue between the king (*'What was your business, women, when you solicited Joseph?'*), the women (*'Heaven be praised! We know of no evil in him.'*), and Potiphar's wife (*'Now the truth has come to light! It was I who solicited him, and he is indeed telling the truth*', 12:51), all suggest that the Potiphar's wife later misled her husband about Joseph's innocence. She may have caused him to doubt the evidence or even believe the opposite of what the signs indicated. This likely resulted from her complete influence over him and her control over his heart and mind.

Therefore, Joseph's imprisonment may have been facilitated or ordered by her to deflect the accusations from herself and to punish Joseph, hoping he would yield to her and comply with her commands, as she had threatened him in front of the women, saying, '*... and if he does not do what I bid him, surely he shall be imprisoned and be among the abased*' (12:32).

وَدَخَلَ مَعَهُ السِّجْنَ فَتَيَانِ ۖ قَالَ أَحَدُهُمَا إِنِّي أَرَانِي أَعْصِرُ خَمْرًا ۖ وَقَالَ
الْآخَرُ إِنِّي أَرَانِي أَحْمِلُ فَوْقَ رَأْسِي خُبْزًا تَأْكُلُ الطَّيْرُ مِنْهُ ۖ نَبِّئْنَا بِتَأْوِيلِهِ ۖ
إِنَّا نَرَاكَ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(12:36) There entered the prison two servants (*fatayān*) along with him. One of them said, 'I dreamed that I am pressing grapes.' The other said, 'I dreamed that I am carrying bread on my head from which the birds are eating.' 'Inform us of its interpretation, for indeed we see you to be a virtuous man.'

*Fatā* means a slave (*'abd*), and the context of the verse indicates that they were two servants of the king. This is what has come down in narrations, which we will discuss later.

***One of them said, 'I dreamed that I am pressing wine*** **(arānī aʿṣiru khamran)'**—The phrase *one of them said* serves to separate the statement,

*There entered the prison...* from the account of the prisoner's dream, as indicated by the context and the statement, '*I dreamed...*', which he spoke to his cellmate.

Some commentators have said that the phrase *arānī* is used to describe an earlier state of affairs; '... *pressing wine*' means pressing grapes in order to make wine; the Qur'an uses the word *khamr* instead of grapes in consideration of their end purpose.

The meaning is that one of awoke from his sleep and told Joseph, 'I have dreamed that I was pressing grapes to make wine.'

***The other said, 'I dreamed that I am carrying bread on my head from which the birds are eating'***—meaning that the birds are pecking at it; this is another dream mentioned by the second prisoner.

***'Inform us of its interpretation, for indeed we see you to be a virtuous man'***—In other words, the two of them ask Joseph to inform them of the significance of their dreams. Note that the Qur'an does not explicitly use the verb, 'they said', and this is an example of its stylistic elegance. The phrase, '*its interpretation*' refers to each of their dreams, as the context suggests.

***'For indeed we see you to be a virtuous man'*** explains why they are asking Joseph to interpret their dreams. '*We see you*' means 'we believe you to be virtuous based on the marks of virtue we perceive in you.' In other words, the only they have told him their dreams and asked for their interpretations is because of his moral character, as common folk generally believe that righteous people with pure hearts and souls have a clearer insight into the true nature of circumstances than others and are a source of reliable wisdom and advice.

قَالَ لَا يَأْتِيكُمَا طَعَامٌ تُرْزَقَانِهِ إِلَّا نَبَّأْتُكُمَا بِتَأْوِيلِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمَا ۚ
ذَٰلِكُمَا مِمَّا عَلَّمَنِي رَبِّي ۚ إِنِّي تَرَكْتُ مِلَّةَ قَوْمٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَهُمْ
بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(12:37) He said, 'Before the meals you are served come to you I will inform you of its interpretation. That is among things my Lord has taught me. Indeed I renounce the creed of the people who have no faith in Allah and who disbelieve in the Hereafter.

When the two prisoners approached Joseph asking for the interpretation of their dreams, given the high regard they held him in due to the marks of moral rectitude they saw in him, he seized this opportunity to convey the secrets of monotheism and to call them to his Lord, the Exalted, who had taught him the interpretation of dreams. He informed them that he was knowledgeable in these matters by the teaching of his Lord, well-acquainted with the interpretation of events, and used that as a means to reveal the essence of monotheism and reject the association of any partners with God. Then he began interpreting their dreams.

*'Before the meals you are served come to you—while you are in prison—I will inform you of its interpretation*—meaning the interpretation of that food, its nature, and what its matter leads to, for I have experience in this matter. Let this be a sign of the truth of what I invite you both to in the monotheistic religion.

This reading is based on the assumption that the pronoun '*it*' in '*its interpretation*' refers to the food. In this context, it represents a mark of his prophethood, similar to Jesus's saying to the Children of Israel, *And I will tell you what you have eaten and what you have stored in your houses. There is indeed a sign in that for you, should you be faithful* (3:49). Some narrations from the Household of the Prophet also support this interpretation, as will be discussed when we come to our study of the narrations that pertain to this section.

However, if the pronoun in '*its interpretation*' refers to what they saw in their dreams, then his statement, *Before the meals you are served come to you* ... is a promise to interpret their dream quickly. Yet, this interpretation seems somewhat unlikely when considering the overall context.

*'... That is among things my Lord has taught me. Indeed I renounce the creed of the people who have no faith in Allah and who disbelieve in the Hereafter* (wa hum bi al-ākhira hum kāfirūn).[1]

وَاتَّبَعْتُ مِلَّةَ آبَائِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ ۚ مَا كَانَ لَنَا أَنْ نُشْرِكَ
بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْنَا وَعَلَى النَّاسِ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ
النَّاسِ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

1 The author has combined this part of verse 37 with verse 38 which follows, in the original Ar. text. (Ed.)

(12:38) I follow the creed of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is not for us to ascribe any partner to Allah. That is by virtue of Allah's grace upon us and upon all mankind, but most people do not give thanks.'

Joseph explains that his knowledge of the interpretation of dreams and his ability to derive signs and portents from them does not belong to the category of ordinary, acquired knowledge, but rather from what God taught him. He then gave his rejection of the idolaters beliefs and his adherence to the faith of his forefathers as the reason for this, meaning he rejected idolatry and professed the religion of monotheism, and because of this God gifted him the ability to interpret dreams.

As we have discussed previously, idolaters believe in God and affirm a Day of Recompense by subscribing to reincarnation. However, the monotheistic belief dictates that one who associates partners with God, whether in terms of worldly influence or being deserving of worship, does not truly believe in God. Furthermore, the belief that souls, after death, return to this world in other bodies to experience pleasure or pain as a result of their past actions does not cohere with belief in the Resurrection. Hence, Joseph denies that such people believe in God or the Hereafter and emphasized their disbelief in the afterlife by repeating the pronoun *hum* ('they') in *and who disbelieve in the Hereafter*. This is because someone who does not believe in God is more likely not to believe in the return of souls to Him for the Final Judgment.

Then God recounts Joseph's words, '*I follow the creed of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*'—This was the first time since coming to Egypt, that Joseph had spoken openly about his lineage and that he belonged to the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

***'It is not for us to ascribe any partner to Allah. That is by virtue of Allah's grace upon us and upon all mankind, but most people do not give thanks'***—This means that God, in His majesty, has not given us, the Household of the Prophet, any means to associate anything with Him, and He has protected us from doing so. This protection is a favor and blessing from God upon us, the Household, and upon all people. However, most people do not recognize or appreciate this divine favor. Instead, they deny it.

As for the assertion that God made them in such a way that they could

never associate partners with Him, this does not mean He compelled them (*ijbār*) in this, but rather that He guided (*tasdīd*) and supported (*ta'yīd*) them. They were blessed with prophethood and divine messengership, and God knows best where He places His message. Therefore, they sought God's protection against idolatry and held fast to monotheistic belief.

The reason this is counted a divine favor upon them and upon the people is that they were supported with the truth, which is the greatest of favors. This, in turn, means that the people have the opportunity to turn to them, achieve salvation by following them, and find divine guidance in their teachings.

However, the fact is that most people are ungrateful is because they deny these blessings, particularly prophethood and divine messengership. They either disregard it, not following its bearers, or they deny the blessing of monotheism by associating partners with God, be these angels, jinn, or humans, and worshipping them instead of God.

This is the explanation most commentators and exegetes have given for this verse.

However, there remains an additional point: namely that monotheism and the negation of associating partners with God is not something derived from prophetic teachings alone. It is something innate, know both by reason and innate human nature. To call this a divine favor for people in terms of their following the prophets misses the mark; in the matter of monotheism, both the people and the prophets are on an equal footing and both of them follow the same divine law. If people reject monotheism, it's due to their failure to heed the call of their natural disposition, not due to their failure to follow the prophets.

It's essential to understand that just as it is incumbent for God in His divine care to equip humanity with a rational capacity to discern good from evil, piety from impiety, and to grasp the tenets of religion and divine laws—which are paths of prophethood and revelation, as we've clarified in our previous discussions—it is also incumbent for Him in His divine care to endow certain individuals with pure souls, sound hearts, and an inherent disposition toward His oneness. These individuals steadfastly uphold monotheism, ensuring its continuity through the ages and reviving the spirit of human flourishing and felicity from one generation to the next. The evidence for this is the same as the evidence for prophethood

and revelation. An ordinary individual might forget the innate principle of monotheism or be prone to falling into idolatry, and what is possible for one might be possible for all. If everyone were misled into polytheism, it would be the ultimate corruption of humanity and would negate the divine purpose of creation.

It is imperative that within a society, there are individuals deeply imbued with a devoted commitment to monotheism, who uphold its principles, defend it, and awaken people from the twin slumbers of heedlessness and ignorance by presenting arguments for it, presenting the evidence for it, and teaching its signs. There exists between these individuals and the public a bond of teaching and learning, not one of driving forward or following.

If such souls exist, they are surely the souls of the prophets and the Imāms. Their creation and divine mission are a favor from God, exalted be He, to them and to all of humankind. These are a favor to them because He has taught them His oneness, and they are a favor to other people because, by creating them, God has appointed someone who reminds them of the truth that is intrinsic to and deeply rooted in their nature. This favor defends the truth against their negligence and misguidance. People's engagement in material pursuits and sensual matters lures them toward worldly pleasures, prompting them to cling to the material world. This distracts them from spiritual matters and makes them forget the divine knowledge ingrained within them. Without divinely inspired individuals constantly reminding people of the eternal home, the earth would be consumed by blindness, the connection between earth and heaven would be severed, the purpose of creation would be nullified, and the earth would be ruined along with its inhabitants.

From this, it becomes clear what the verse means when it says: '*It is not for us to ascribe any partner to Allah. That is by virtue of Allah's grace upon us and upon all mankind, but most people do not give thanks.*' In other words, through God's support, we have no way to associate anything with Him and this security from idol worship is a grace bestowed by God upon us, because it is the guidance from which flows mankind's happiness and supreme success. And this same security we enjoy is a grace bestowed by God on humankind, because it serves to remind people of the truth when they forget it, alert them to it when they are negligent of it, educate them

about it when they are ignorant of it, and correct them when they deviate from it. However, most people do not express gratitude to God; instead, they deny this blessing, taking no heed of it, refusing to accept it, and turning away from it.

Some scholars have said with regard to the meaning of the verse that what is alluded to by *That is by virtue of Allah's grace upon us ...* is the knowledge of interpreting dreams. However, as should be clear, this is far removed from the context of the verse.

يَا صَاحِبَيِ السِّجْنِ أَأَرْبَابٌ مُتَفَرِّقُونَ خَيْرٌ أَمِ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ ﴿٣٩﴾

(12:39) O my prison mates! Are different masters (*arbāb mutafarriqūn*) better (*khayr*), or Allah, the One, the All-paramount?

The term *khayr* ('better'), in this context, linguistically, refers to a choice between two entities where one is superior in a desired attribute, and therefore, is chosen over the other one. The *khayr* of two actions is the more desirable one that should be performed; the *khayr* of two things is the one that is more desirable from the perspective of its benefit and utility. Just like the *khayr* of two properties is in terms of comfort, the *khayr* of two people is in terms of companionship, and the *khayr* of two deities is in terms of worship. Literary scholars have noted that the original term for *khayr* is actually *akhyar*, in the comparative form. In essence, it's a verbal adjective implying superiority in a specific context.

Based on what has already discussed, when Joseph said, '*Are different masters better, or Allah, the One, the All-paramount?*, he was setting forth an argument emphasizing the obligation of worshipping the One God, especially when faced with the choice between Him and all other entities which are claimed to be gods apart from Him. This is not merely an affirmation that He is the only true existing entity in contrast to other so-called lords, or that He is the supreme deity to which everything ultimately returns, but it signifies that something is considered 'better' or 'preferred' when it is sought after and chosen, and in this context, it is preferable to choose the True Lord, and this means to worship Him alone.

Notice that Joseph referred to their deities as *arbāb mutafarriqūn* ('different masters') because they worshipped angels, whom they believed

to be God's attributes, or particular sacred manifestations through which blessings and prosperity in the world are channeled. They differentiated (*yufarriqūn*) between these attributes, organizing and venerating each one for its particular domain—be it the god of knowledge, power, heaven, earth, beauty, love, security, fertility, and so on. They worshipped *jinn*, considered as sources of evil in the world, representing death, decay, poverty, ugliness, pain, sorrow, and more. They also revered certain holy men, tyrannical rulers, kings, and others. All of these were distinct both in their essence and in the idols and statues that were made to represent and connect with them.

In contrast to these separate entities, Joseph evoked the name of God, exalted be His name, and described Him as the One, the All-Paramount, asserting, '*or Allah, the One, the All-paramount?*' And this statement, by its very meaning, stands in stark opposition to '*different lords*' due to the juxtaposition inherent in the structure of the sentence.

God represents the ultimate dominant force, signifying the sacred divine essence that is undeniable and an existence that is untouched by nothingness or decay. An existence of this nature can't be limited or extended, because anything limited is non-existent beyond its limit, and anything extended is void after its extension. Thus, He is an infinite entity, an endless existence. Given this nature, it's inconceivable to assign to Him attributes that are separate from His essence, as that would imply His limitation and need for attributes. It's also impossible to differentiate between His intrinsic attributes, like life, knowledge, and power, as that would introduce internal divisions, making the essence and attributes distinct and multiple. Such notions, including the belief in bounded and diversified gods, are recognized characteristics of idolatrous beliefs based on our understanding of them.

One of the axiomatic beliefs of intelligent persons who affirm the existence of God is that God exists inherently, stable in His essence, and that He alone possesses this quality. The attributes of perfection He possesses are innate and not additional to Him. They are not parts of Him but are Him entirely. He is knowledge, power, and life in and of Himself.

God is, in His essence, singular in both His being and attributes. This means He is the sole existence, unique in His essence, without anything comparable existing independently. He's singular in His attributes,

meaning there isn't a real attribute of His that isn't intrinsically Him. He is the one who dominates over everything, and nothing can dominate Him.

It is this understanding led the Prophet Joseph to refer to God as '*the One, the All-paramount*.' This implies that God is one, but not in terms of number, such that it is possible to count Him. If another is added to Him, it doesn't make Him two. He is one in such a way that no other essence can be presumed to exist independently beside Him. Similarly, no attribute can be presumed for Him without it being intrinsically Him; otherwise, it becomes invalid. All this because He is an entity without boundaries or an end.

The Prophet Joseph's argument against his interlocutors is solidified in this question when he describes the multiple deities as diverse, and God as '*the One, the All-paramount*'. This is because it is the very nature of God to be singular and dominant, and this negates any division—no matter what kind of division is posited—between His essence and His attributes. The divine essence is the divine attributes, and the divine attributes are each other. So, whoever worships the essence, worships both the essence and the attributes. If one worships His knowledge but not His essence, then he worships neither His knowledge nor His essence, and the same analogy applies to all the other divine attributes too.

Thus, if one was given a choice in worship between multiple deities and the One All-paramount God, they would necessarily choose the latter, for one cannot posit the existence of multiple deities or division in worship. However, a point remains, which is invoked upon by the majority of idolaters: they argue that God is too sublime and transcendent for our minds to comprehend or our intellects to grasp. Therefore, we cannot directly worship or approach Him. What we can do is worship some of His noble creations who have a role in the order of the universe, hoping they bring us closer to Him and intercede with Him on our behalf. Joseph addressed this in the following part of his statement, meaning his words, '*You do not worship besides Him but names ...*', and thereby refuted this claim.

مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءً سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُمْ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ
بِهَا مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ ۚ إِنِ الْحُكْمُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ ۚ أَمَرَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ الدِّينُ
الْقَيِّمُ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

> (12:40) You do not worship besides Him but names that you and your fathers have coined, for which Allah has not sent down any authority. Sovereignty belongs only to Allah. He has commanded you to worship none except Him. That is the upright religion, but most people do not know.

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Note how Joseph began by addressing his two cellmates in prison, but then addressed everyone, because the rule here applies equally to them and to others who worship idols.

Denying that the act of worship is directed toward anything but mere names implies that there are no actual entities behind these names. Therefore, worship is placed in opposition to these names, like the deity of the sky, the deity of the earth, the deity of the sea, the deity of the land, father, mother, the son of the deity, and the like.

The assertion that there are no real entities behind these names is strengthened by his saying, '*you and your fathers*.' It is meant to be exclusive, implying that no one has established or assigned any validity to these names except you and your ancestors. He then reinforces this by saying, '*for which Allah has not sent down any authority* (sulṭān)' Here, the term *sulṭān* refers to evidence that is compelling to reason. This means God has not revealed any evidence that would indicate the existence of real entities behind these names or that they have any divine attributes, which would justify worshipping them.

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It's possible that the phrase '*for which*' refers to the act of worship itself, implying that God has not sent down evidence to support the veneration of these idols, the idea that they have power to intercede with Him, or the notion that they exercise independent influence in the world. In any case, the matter ultimately belongs to God, as indicated by His statement: *Sovereignty belongs only to Allah.*

The statement, *Sovereignty belongs only to Allah*, is undoubtedly true. For a decree about something to go aright, it must come from the one who has absolute control of the matter. Truly, the only one who has control and governance over worldly affairs and the guidance of His servants is God. Thus, there is no true ruling except from Him. This statement serves as a rationale for the previous and subsequent statements. Regarding the previous statement, '*for which Allah has not sent down any authority*', its significance has already been made clear. As for its significance in relation

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to the subsequent statement, '*He has commanded you to worship none except Him*,' it emphasizes that God's decree, both in affirmation and negation, is always decisive. So, when it is said, '*for which Allah has not sent down any authority*', it leads one to question: 'Then what did He decree concerning worship?' The answer is, "'*He has commanded you to worship none except Him*,' That is why this statement begins with a verb rather than a conjunction linking it to the previous statement, which makes it like a new sentence in response to this implicit question.

Therefore, the overall meaning of the verse appears to be: 'What you worship other than God are mere names that you and your forefathers have fabricated, without any authoritative proof from God Himself to indicate that they have the power to intercede with God on your behalf or any independent influence over the affairs of this world. Therefore, it is not valid for you to worship them, to seek their intercession, whether out of hope to win some benefit for them or out of fear that they might do you harm.'

As for Joseph's statement: '*That is the upright religion* (dhālik al-dīn al-qayyim)*, but most people do not know*', the demonstrative pronoun *dhālik* ('that') refers to the aforementioned transcendent oneness of God and the negation of any partners that might be associated with Him. The term *qayyim* ('upright') refers to that which is firmly established (*qā'im*) and capable of managing its affairs or that which stands (*qā'im*) on its own without wavering or submission. This means that the religion of monotheism is the only religion capable of managing a society and guiding it to a state of felicity and human flourishing. Monotheism is the firm religion without any deviation, embodying true divine guidance and utterly devoid of any form of falsehood. However, most people, due to their immersion in the sensory world and indulgence in its fleeting allure and evanescent vanities, are deprived of a pure heart and a clear mind. They only understand the superficial aspects of this worldly life, and they turn away from the Hereafter as a result.

As for monotheism being a rational religion that aligns with reality, the arguments established by Joseph are sufficient demonstrate this: It is capable of managing human society because a society thrives when its norms and lifestyle regulations are founded on truths that align with reality. It doesn't flourish if built upon baseless myths without any steadfast foundation.

It's evident from the above explanation that the entire set of verses, beginning with '*O my prison mates ...!*' until '*... to worship none except Him*', serve as a single argument for monotheism in worship. The essence of this argument is that if the worship of a deity is due to its intrinsic divinity and its inherent necessity of existence, then God, in His existence, is singular and overpowering. It's inconceivable for Him to have a second or another entity influencing alongside Him. Hence, the concept of multiple gods is baseless. If one wishes to worship other deities because other entities besides God are considered as His partners, interceding on His behalf, there's no evidence to affirm their intercession from God Himself. On the contrary, both reason and the words of the Prophets decree that none but Him should be worshipped.

This makes clear the flaw in al-Bayḍāwī's explanation of these verses, in which he follows the path trod by al-Zamakhsharī in *al-Kashshāf*. He proposed that the two verses provide two proofs for monotheism. The first verse, which states, '*Are different masters better, or Allah, the One, the All-paramount?*' serves as a rhetorical proof, while the second verse, which reads, '*You do not worship besides Him but names that you and your fathers have coined*' is a logical argument.

Al-Bayḍāwī says: 'This represents a gradation in the call to faith, first emphasizing the superiority of monotheism over polytheism through rhetorical means, and then proving that what they call gods and worship are not worthy of divinity. For the justification of worship is either intrinsic or extrinsic, and both justifications are absent for them. He then explicitly mentions what is the upright truth and the straight religion, which reason cannot dictate otherwise, and knowledge cannot accept anything but it.'

Perhaps what led al-Bayḍāwī to adopt this reading of the verse was the use of the word 'better' (*khayr*) in the first verse, from which he inferred a rhetorical hue. However, he overlooked the qualifier '*the One, the All-paramount?*' Furthermore, we have already explained how the two verses constitute a single unified argument, and the meaning he extracted from the second verse is, in fact, the implication of both verses combined, not the second one alone.

Another possible reading of the two verses can present two proofs for monotheism in a different manner. The summary of these proofs is as follows: God, the One, dominates with His power over all distinct causes that

act in the universe, harmonizing their diverse effects so that they together form a cohesive, non-contradictory system. This observable unity and harmony of causes is superior to multiple, discordant deities from which, due to their disparity and opposition, various inconsistent systems and contradictory directives would emerge, leading to the disintegration of the universal order and corruption of the unified cosmic order.

Furthermore, the deities worshipped apart from God are merely names, with no evidence supporting the existence of the entities they refer to, neither rationally nor through revelation. Reason only points to monotheism, and the prophets, by divine instruction, were only commanded to worship God alone.

This reading, as you can see, aligns the first verse with the meaning of the saying of God, *Had there been gods in them other than Allah, they would surely have fallen apart* (21:22). The second verse generalizes the negation of the divinity of any deity other than God, both in essence and in terms of God's permission for their having the power of intercession.

However, this reading can be rejected for the following reasons: First, it qualifies the absolute meaning of '*the All-paramount*' without there being any explicit verbal qualifier. Indeed, God, in His glory, not only overpowers causes in their effects on the cosmos but also dominates everything in its essence, attributes, and consequences too. He has no equal in His existence, and no second in His independent essence or in His power. Given His unchallenged unity, it is inconceivable to propose something that exists independently of Him, or a matter that operates independently of His will. A deity that is posited other than Him is either entirely independent in its essence and all its effects or merely independent in the effects of its essence. Both propositions are untenable, as is self-evident.

Second, this explanation makes a general claim based on the specific meaning of the second verse without providing a general basis for it. The verse—as you know—associates the divinity of other entities with God's permission and His decree, as is evident in the phrase: '*for which Allah has not sent down any authority. Sovereignty belongs only to Allah*.' It is clear that this divinity, which is contingent upon His permission and decree, is a divinity of intercession and not an intrinsic divinity of essence, which is what He possesses. It refers to divinity by virtue of another, not something more general than this, which would be divinity in essence and by

another combined.

يَا صَاحِبَيِ السِّجْنِ أَمَّا أَحَدُكُمَا فَيَسْقِي رَبَّهُ خَمْرًا ۖ وَأَمَّا الْآخَرُ فَيُصْلَبُ فَتَأْكُلُ الطَّيْرُ مِنْ رَأْسِهِ ۚ قُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ الَّذِي فِيهِ تَسْتَفْتِيَانِ ﴿٤١﴾

(12:41) O my prison mates! As for one of you, he will serve wine to his master, and as for the other, he will be crucified, and vultures will eat from his head. The matter about which you inquire has been decided.'

The meaning of the verse is clear, and the context clearly indicates that the phrase '*As for one of you ...*', interprets the dream of the one who said, '*I dreamed that I am pressing wine.*' And the phrase '*and as for the other ...*' interprets the dream of the other, who saw birds eating bread from his head.

When Joseph says, '*The matter about which you inquire has been decided ...*', this suggests that one of the two companions, or perhaps both, disavowed the veracity of the dream he had previously claimed to have. Perhaps it was the latter who, upon hearing the interpretation of his dream about crucifixion and birds eating from his head, called it false. This is supported by the narration from the Imāms of the Household of the Prophet, in which the latter said, 'I lied about the dream I related to you.' To which the Prophet Joseph replied, '*The matter about which you inquire has been decided*.' This means that the interpretation you sought is definite and inevitable.

وَقَالَ لِلَّذِي ظَنَّ أَنَّهُ نَاجٍ مِنْهُمَا اذْكُرْنِي عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ فَأَنْسَاهُ الشَّيْطَانُ ذِكْرَ رَبِّهِ فَلَبِثَ فِي السِّجْنِ بِضْعَ سِنِينَ ﴿٤٢﴾

(12:42) Then he said to the one whom he knew (*ẓanna*) would be delivered from among the two: 'Mention me to your master.' But Satan caused him to forget mentioning it to his master. So he remained in the prison for several years.

The pronouns in '*he said*', '*he knew*', and '*he remained*' refer to Joseph. Joseph said to the prisoner that he knew would be saved of the two: 'Mention me to your master in a manner that might evoke his mercy,

so perhaps he would release me from prison.'

Some have said that the use of the verb *ẓanna* ('to think') here, in conjunction with his clear statement that the matter is determined and that it was God who taught him the interpretation of dreams, suggests that it is being used here to mean 'to believe' in a general sense (without considering the level of certainty behind that belief), as per the verse: *those who believe that they will encounter their Lord* (2:46)

As for the claim made by others that the use of *ẓanna* here to express belief indicates that Joseph's interpretation was merely a result of his own reasoning, this is refuted by what we previously highlighted: that he explicitly stated his knowledge to them in his words in the previous verse, '*The matter about which you inquire has been decided*', and God further confirmed this by saying, that He would teach him '*the interpretation of dreams*' (12:6). This counters the idea that Joseph's interpretation of their dream was based on his own reasoning or independent thought..

Some have also allowed the possibility that the subject of the verb *ẓanna* here is not Joseph but the relative pronoun '*the one who*', meaning that he said to the companion of the two who now believed himself saved on the basis of Joseph's interpretation of their respective dreams. This reading is plausible, especially if it is supported by the context.

Regarding the statement, *But Satan caused him to forget mentioning it to his master*, the two pronouns '*him*' and '*his*' refer to back '*the one who*', meaning that Satan made the one who was saved forget to mention Joseph to his master. As a result, Joseph remained in prison for several years, with *several* (biʿḍ) referring to a number less than ten. The construction of *mentioning it to his master* in Arabic is *dhikr rabbi-hi* (lit. 'the mention of his master'), but this is akin to linking a verb's infinitive to its object, to which it would usually be linked by a preposition, or to its adverbial qualifier, in a kind of figurative construct.

Some commentators have read the two pronouns as referring to Joseph, suggesting that Satan caused Joseph to forget the mention of God, in the sense that he relied upon someone other than God for his release from prison, and, as a result, was punished by being left in prison for several years. This reading might be derived from a tradition to this effect.

However, such an explanation of the verse goes against the explicit text of the Qur'an. For God explicitly declares Joseph to be among his exclusive

and devoted servants, and He has established elsewhere that Satan has no sway over such people. This is in addition to the other praises that God has bestowed upon Joseph in this chapter. Therefore, it is not possible for Satan to have caused him to forget God.

Furthermore, being exclusively devoted to God does not necessitate abandoning the pursuit of worldly means to achieve one's goals; indeed, thinking otherwise is a great misconception, as this would be tantamount seeking something unattainable. On the contrary, what is required is not to place undue trust in these worldly means or to depend on them in place of God. And there's nothing in his statement, '*Mention me to your master*', that suggests this in the least.

Furthermore, God's statement after two verses, *Said the one of the two who had been delivered, remembering after a long time* (12:45), serves as a strong indicator that the one who forgot was the cupbearer rather than Joseph.

## Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, exegesis, it is narrated by Abū al-Jārūd from Abū Jaʿfar al-Bāqir regarding the verse, *Then it appeared to them, after they had seen all the signs, that they should confine him for some time* (12:35): 'The word "signs" here refers to the testimony of the boy, the shirt that was torn from the back, and their rushing to the door until the sound of their altercation was heard by the one beside the door. After Joseph rejected her advances, the wife of Potiphar did not let her husband alone until Joseph was imprisoned.

In prison with him were two young men, who are said to have been servants of the king; one was a baker, and the other was a cupbearer. The one who lied and did not have the dream was the baker.'

ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī quotes the tradition: 'The king had assigned two men to watch over Joseph. Upon entering the prison, they asked him about his profession, to which he replied that he was an interpreter of dreams. One of the assigned men had a dream, as he said, of pressing wine. Joseph interpreted this as follows: "You will be released and serve the king his wine, and your

position with him will be elevated." The other man claimed, "I see myself carrying bread above my head, from which birds eat", even though he hadn't truly seen such a dream. Joseph told him: "The king will execute you, and you will be crucified, with birds pecking at your head." The man laughed and denied having such a dream, so Joseph responded as God narrated: *O my prison mates! As for one of you, he will serve wine to his master, and as for the other, he will be crucified, and vultures will eat from his head. The matter about which you inquire has been decided* (12:41).

Regarding the words of the two men imprisoned with Joseph, '*for indeed we see you to be a virtuous man*' (12:36), Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Ṣādiq said: 'Joseph used to attend to the sick, provide for the needy, and was generous to the prisoners. When the one who had the dream of pressing wine was about to be released from the prison, Joseph told him, "Mention me to your master." But, as God recounts, *Satan caused him to forget mentioning it to his master*.'

**Author's comments:** This narration displays some signs of lexical confusion. The apparent meaning suggests that the two men with Joseph in the prison were not prisoners but were assigned to him by the king. This interpretation contradicts the obvious meaning of God's verses: *Then he said to the one whom he knew would be delivered from among the two ...* (12:41) and *Said the one of the two who had been delivered ...* (12:41).

(2) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, according to Sumāʿa, regarding God's verse, *'Mention me to your master'* (12:42), he said: 'The master refers to Potiphar (al-ʿAzīz).'

(3) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī relates from the *Kitāb al-ʿUqūbāt* of of Ibn Abī Dunyā, Ibn Jarīr, al-Ṭabrānī, and Ibn Mardawayh, all of whom narrate from Ibn ʿAbbās: 'The Messenger of God, said, "Had Joseph not uttered the word—the reason he remained in prison as long as he did—where he sought relief from someone other than God Almighty, his duration would have been different."

**Author's comments:** This was also narrated by Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and Ibn Mardawayh from Abū Hurayra, who said, quoting the Prophet: 'May God have mercy on Joseph. Had he not said, "Mention

me to your master", he would not have remained in prison for as long as he did.' Similar narrations come from 'Ikrima, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and others.

Something similar is narrated in *Tafsīr al-'Ayyāshī* from Ṭarbāl, from Ibn Abī Ya'qūb, from Ya'qūb b. Shu'ayb, from Abū 'Abd Allāh that God said to Joseph: 'Aren't you the one who I made dear to your father, and favored with beauty above all others? Wasn't it the caravan that I sent that saved you and brought you out of the well? Wasn't I the one who protected you from the cunning of the womenfolk? What prompted you to seek assistance or call upon a creation other than Me? Remain for a few years because of what you said.' However, it should be noted that such narrations contradict the explicit text of the Qur'an.

Similarly, in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, it is narrated from Ibn Mardawayh, from Ibn 'Abbās: 'Joseph made three errors: when he said, "*Mention me to your master*", so he stayed in prison for several years, and Satan made him forget the remembrance of his Lord; And when he said, "*You are indeed thieves!*" (12:70), they said *that he may know that I did not betray him in private*" (12:52) Gabriel then said to him, "Not even when you made for her?" To which Joseph replied, "*I do not absolve my own soul*" (12:53).' However, in this narration, deceit and clear lying are attributed to the Prophet Joseph."

In some of these narrations, his three errors are presented as his making for the wife of Potiphar, His saying, '*Mention me to your master*', and his saying '*Your are thieves.*' However, God, the Exalted, absolves him from these false accusations in the clear text of His Book.

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## Verses 43–57

This section of verses contains the story of Joseph's release from prison, his attainment of rank and prestige in Egypt prestige, and the factors that led to these developments. They also portray the King's second inquiry into the accusations against him and the revelation of his complete innocence.

وَقَالَ الْمَلِكُ إِنِّي أَرَى سَبْعَ بَقَرَاتٍ سِمَانٍ يَأْكُلُهُنَّ سَبْعٌ عِجَافٌ وَسَبْعَ سُنبُلاتٍ خُضْرٍ وَأُخَرَ يَابِسَاتٍ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلأُ أَفْتُونِي فِي رُؤْيَايَ إِن كُنتُمْ لِلرُّؤْيَا تَعْبُرُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

(12:43) One day the king said, 'I saw seven fat cows (*baqarāt simān*) being devoured by seven lean ones (*'ijāf*), and seven green ears and others dry. O courtiers, give me your opinion (*aftūnī*) about my dream, if you can interpret dreams (*ta'burūn*).'

This verse relates a dream of the king which he shares with his council. Evidence for this being a dream is found in his statement, '*O courtiers, give me your opinion about my dream ...*' and his words, '*I saw*' (*arā*). The phrasing suggests that he is recounting a past event, and it is possible that this was a recurring dream, similar to the earlier statements of the prisoners: *'I dreamed that I am pressing wine'* and *'I dreamed that I am carrying bread*.'

The word *simān* is the plural form of *samīna*, meaning 'fat', while *'ijāf* is the plural of *'ajfā'*, meaning 'emaciated' or 'lean.' In *Majma' al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī says: 'Arabic nouns on the pattern of *fa'lā'* are not made plural according to the pattern of *fi'āl*, with the exception of *ajfā'*, which becomes *'ijāf*. The pattern of conjugtion of *'ujf* to *'ajfā'* is in the same manner as colors such as *ḥumr* to *ḥamrā'*, *khuḍr* to *kharā'*, and *bayḍ* to *bayḍā'* (the colors 'red', 'green', and 'white' respectively). Some scholars argue that this is a special case and the more regular plural is *'ujuf*.

The verb *iftā'* (from whence *aftūnī* is derived) is derived from *fatwā'* and *futyā*, on the pattern of Form IV (*bāb al-if'āl*). In *Majma' al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī writes: '*Futyā* means providing a judgment or response. Sometimes it refers to simply giving an answer, but this is not termed as

*futyā* in this case.'

The verb *taʿburūn* is derived from *ʿabara*, which means 'to interpret or explain a dream.' It can also be termed as *taʿbīr*. This usage is derived metaphorically from the act of crossing a river or similar, just as one crosses from the outward appearance of a dream to its underlying interpretation. It represents the reality of a situation that appears to the dreamer in a form that is familiar to him.

In *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*, about the phrase, '*seven fat cows*' (*sabʿa baqarātin simānin*), al-Zamakhsharī writes: 'Were you to ask: Is there a difference between assigning the adjective 'fat' (*simān*) to the noun 'cows' (*baqarāt*) rather than the number 'seven' (*sabʿa*)? Could you not also say *sabʿa baqarātin simānan* (note the difference in case ending on *simān*, indicating that it qualifies *sabaʿa* rather than *baqarāt*). The answer is: If we take the word *simān* as an adjective for *baqarāt*, we are not specifying (*tamyīz*) the number 'seven' with 'cows' but of a specific type of cow, namely 'fat cows.' Now, if you assigned the adjective *simān* to the number 'seven', then you would be specifying the number 'seven' with the general category of cows, then describing the number 'seven' with the characteristic of being 'plump.'

Then, if you ask, shouldn't '*seven lean ones*' (sabʿun ʿijāfun) in the possessive form (i.e. as *sabʿun ʿijāfin*)? The response is: 'The purpose of specification (*tamyīz*, where by the noun qualifying a number takes the *-in* case ending) is to clarify the species of the thing being counted, and the adjective 'lean' (*ʿijāf*) does not, by itself, provide that clarity. If you then argue that one can say 'three horsemen' (*thalātha fursān*) or 'five companions' (*khamsa aṣḥāb*), the answer is that terms like 'horseman' (*fāris*), 'companion' (*ṣāḥib*), 'rider' (*rākib*), and the like behave like nouns. Thus, they adopt rules that may not be applicable to other adjectives. For instance, you don't say, 'I have three large' or 'four thick.'

Furthermore, if you ask: Does the verse provide evidence that the dry ears of grain were also seven, like the green ones? The answer is: The statement is constructed to lean toward this number with respect to the fat cows, the lean cows, and the green ears of grain. Therefore, it is necessary to assume the same meaning for the others, meaning seven. Thus, when it is said, '*and others dry*', it implies '*and* seven *others dry*.' If you then ask: Can the phrase '*and other dry*' can be governed grammatically by the

preceding phrase, '*seven green ears*? The answer is no, as this would lead to a syntactical contradiction. This is because relating this phrase to '*seven green ears*' implies that it shares the same rule with them, indicating that it also specifies the type of the number 'seven' that occurs at the beginning of the phrase (in which case the meaning would be 'seven ears, both green and dry'). But the word 'others' implies a distinction from the seven. For example, when you say, 'I have seven men standing and sitting' (*'indī sab'a rijāl qiyām wa qu'ūd*), it is correct since you are specifying the number seven with men described as both standing and sitting (meaning you have a total of seven men, with some sitting and others standing). But if you say, 'He has seven standing men and others sitting' (*'inda-hu sab'a rijāl qiyām wa ākharīn qu'ūd*), it becomes contradictory and incorrect to read it in this way (in other words, there are seven men standing and others who are sitting). In conclusion, despite the intricate linguistic nuances, it remains speculative to assert that the dry ears of grain were also seven in number like the green ones. As for this being something strongly implied by the discourse, it is not conclusive.'

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: The king of Egypt said to his courtiers: 'I see in my dream seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones, and seven green ears of grain, and other dry ones. O courtiers, interpret for me my dream if you can interpret dreams!'

قَالُوٓاْ أَضۡغَٰثُ أَحۡلَٰمٖۖ وَمَا نَحۡنُ بِتَأۡوِيلِ ٱلۡأَحۡلَٰمِ بِعَٰلِمِينَ ٤٤

(12:44) They said, 'Confused nightmares (*aḍghāthu aḥlām*), and we do not know the interpretation of nightmares.'

The word *aḥlām* is the plural of *ḥulum*/*ḥulm*, which refers to what someone sees during sleep (i.e. 'a dream'). Originally, this term referred to what a person perceived within their own mind without sensory input. From this comes the terming of intellect as *ḥilm*, which denotes rightness and stability of thought, and also the use of the term *ḥulum* in reference to a person's age of maturity, as mentioned by God in the verse: *When your children reach maturity* ... (24:59), meaning the age of mental maturity (*bulūgh al-'aql*). Additionally, *ḥilm* can also mean forbearance, the opposite of rashness (*ṭaysh*), which involves restraining oneself and managing one's emotions when experiencing anger and not being hasty to punish

or lash out. Such restraint comes from a stability of thought. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says that the root meaning is *ḥilm*, but this is somewhat difficult to establish conclusively.

Al-Rāgḥib says: 'The word *ḍighth* refers to a bundle of herbs, grass, or twigs, and the plural of this is *aḍghāth*. God says, "*Take a bundle in your hand ...*" (38:44), and confused dreams whose realities are unclear are likened to a bundle in the verse *They said, "Confused nightmares ...",* as though there is a mixed bundle of dreams.'

Describing a single vision as '*confused nightmares*' seems to emphasize its being a collection of scattered, mixed images, each of which requires a separate interpretation. When combined and intermingled, it becomes challenging for the interpreter to decipher them. Often, a person transitions from one vision to another during a single sleep, and if these parts become mixed, they are termed '*confused nightmares*', making it hard to ascertain their true nature. The use of the indefinite form in the expression *aḍghāth aḥlām* further emphasizes this meaning.

However, the previous verse, namely, *One day the king said, 'I saw in a dream ...*' is not explicit in indicating a single dream. For example, in the account found in the Torah, it's mentioned that he saw the fat and lean cows in one dream and the green and dry ears of grain in another.[1]

When the king's courtiers told him, '*...and we do not know the interpretation of nightmares* (al-aḥlām)', note that the term *aḥlām* ('nightmares') is prefixed with the definite article *al-*, which indicates specificity in this case. In other words, they are not knowledgeable about the interpretation of these particular dreams that are composed of mixed-up imagery. However, if we read *al-* is signifying generality, then this means that they are not well-versed in the interpretation of any kinds of dreams, not only ones that are mixed-up. Of course, there is no inherent contradiction between the king's courtiers referring to his dream as '*confused nightmares*' and then saying that they had no expertise in the interpretation of dreams. However, if they meant they had no skill in the interpretation of authentic dreams, then this renders the two parts of their speech entirely unrelated to one another.

The meaning of the verse is that the chief officials said to the king: 'What you saw are but a mixed bundle dreams; a mishmash of various

1 See Genesis 41:1–8

visions. We do not possess knowledge to interpret these kinds of dreams. We can only interpret favorable visions.'

وَقَالَ الَّذِى نَجَا مِنْهُمَا وَادَّكَرَ بَعْدَ أُمَّةٍ أَنَا۠ أُنَبِّئُكُم بِتَأْوِيلِهِ فَأَرْسِلُونِ ﴿٤٥﴾

(12:45) Said the one of the two who had been delivered, remembering after a long time (*umma*): 'I will inform you of its interpretation; so let me go.'

The term *umma* typically refers to a group of people with a shared purpose, but here it refers to a span of years. This refers to the period during which the king's cupbearer forgot to mention Joseph to the king, even after Joseph had asked him to. This forgetfulness was influenced by Satan, causing Joseph to remain in prison for several more years.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'The one who was saved from the prison of Joseph's former cellmates remembered after a span of years what Joseph had asked him when interpreting his dream. He said, "I can tell you the interpretation of what the king saw in his dream. Send me to Joseph in prison, and he will provide the explanation."'

The collective address in his statement, '*I will inform you* (plural)', and '*send* (plural) *me forth*', is meant to include those present with the king, notably the influential figures of the state who managed the affairs of the people. Further evidence for this can also be seen in the subsequent phrase: '*... that I may return to the people ...*' (12:48).

يُوسُفُ أَيُّهَا الصِّدِّيقُ أَفْتِنَا فِى سَبْعِ بَقَرَاتٍ سِمَانٍ يَأْكُلُهُنَّ سَبْعٌ عِجَافٌ وَسَبْعِ سُنبُلَاتٍ خُضْرٍ وَأُخَرَ يَابِسَاتٍ لَّعَلِّىٓ أَرْجِعُ إِلَى النَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

(12:46) 'Joseph! O truthful one, give us your opinion concerning seven fat cows who are eaten by seven lean ones, and seven green ears and others dry, that I may return to the people so that they may know.'

Notice that the verse abridges the narrative for the sake of brevity, the full meaning being: 'So they sent him to Joseph in prison, and he said, "O Joseph, truthful one, explain to us the king's dream!" Then he recounted

the dream, noting that the people eagerly awaited its interpretation. This abbreviated style of narrative is one of the rhetorical features of the Qur'an.

Joseph is referred to as 'truthful' (*ṣiddīq*) due to his consistent and fastidious honesty, as seen in his interpretation of his own dream, the dreams of his fellow inmates, and his actions and words during his imprisonment. God Almighty affirms Joseph's truthful nature without any reservation or pause.

Note also that the dream was described without explicitly stating it was a dream. He said, '*give us your opinion concerning seven fat cows who are eaten by seven lean ones, and seven green ears and others dry*.' This is because the imperative '*give us your opinion*' (aftinā) asks for a judgment or interpretation, and given the previous interaction between the cupbearer and Joseph had revolved around dream interpretation, the context clearly indicates the nature of the request.

***'...that I may return to the people so that they may know'***—the clause '*that I may...*' introduces the reason for his request to Joseph for his interpretation, while the clause '*so that they may...*' provides the reason for his desire to return to the people. In other words, he says to Joseph: 'Interpret this vision for us, for after hearing your interpretation, I hope to return to the people and inform them of it. And, by doing so, I hope that they will understand the meaning of the vision and thereby be freed from their confusion and ignorance.'

From this, it becomes evident that when he said, '... *that I may return* ...' it signifies that he wishes to return with this knowledge. It is clear that if he received the interpretation of the vision and then returned to the people, he would come back as someone knowledgeable about the interpretation, well-informed about its implications. Therefore, his return would then be associated with the interpretation he received. Understand this context.

By first saying, '*give us your opinion ...*' and then, '... *that I may return to the people ...*' this suggests that he sought the interpretation on behalf of the king and the council, not just for his own personal understanding to then inform them. Instead, he made clear that he intended to convey it to them. This is why Joseph didn't address him alone but directed his response to include others by saying, '*You will sow ...*' and so on.

Furthermore, by saying '*to the people*' (and not merely 'to the king' or 'to the courtiers'), it suggests that word of the king's dream had spread

among the people and that they too were awaiting its interpretation to lift their confusion and anxiety. It is also possible that the council was acting on behalf of the people's concerns, or that the people themselves were deeply connected and concerned about the king's vision. This is because dreams often reflect one's main concerns in life, and kings are mostly concerned with affairs of the kingdom and the well-being of their subjects.

قَالَ تَزْرَعُونَ سَبْعَ سِنِينَ دَأَبًا فَمَا حَصَدتُّمْ فَذَرُوهُ فِي سُنبُلِهِ إِلاَّ قَلِيلاً مِّمَّا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

(12:47) He said, 'You will sow for seven consecutive years (*sabʿa sinīna da'ban*). Then leave in the ear whatever you harvest, except a little that you eat.

Al-Rāghib says: '*Da'b* means to continue along a way. God says: *He disposed the sun and the moon for you, constant in their courses* (dā'ibīn). *Da'b* refers to a consistent, unchanging pattern or habit, as God says: *like the habit* (da'b) *of Pharaoh's clan* (3:11), meaning "like their pattern that they continuously followed."' Therefore, this means you will cultivate for seven years in a continuous and successive manner.

Some have said the *da'b* refers to hard work (*taʿb*), meaning they should plant with great effort and dedication. It could also be seen as an adverbial phrase, suggesting that they should be consistently diligent or continuously hardworking in their cultivation.

Some have said that '*You will sow ...*' is presented as an assertion rather than a command, emphasizing the importance of compliance as if it is an established fact being reported. Often, commands are presented in the form of statements to stress the importance of obedience, as seen in God's words: *You have faith in Allah and His Messenger, and wage jihad in the way of Allah* (61:11). Supporting this interpretation is the subsequent statement, '*Then leave in the ear whatever you harvest.*' It's said that they were instructed to leave the grain in its ear because the ears don't easily get infested by pests or deteriorate, even if stored for a long time. However, if the grain is threshed and cleaned, it deteriorates more quickly.

The meaning is: 'Plant continuously for seven years. Whatever you harvest, leave it in its ear so that it does not perish. Preserve it in this manner, except for the small amount you consume during these years.'

ثُمَّ يَأْتِي مِن بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ سَبْعٌ شِدَادٌ يَأْكُلْنَ مَا قَدَّمْتُمْ لَهُنَّ إِلاَّ قَلِيلاً مِّمَّا تُحْصِنُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(12:48) Then after that there will come seven hard years (*sabʿun shidād*) which will eat up whatever you have set aside for them—all except a little which you protect (*tuḥṣinūn*).

*Shidād* ('hard') is the plural of *shadīd*, meaning 'severe' or 'difficult.' This pertains to the difficulty and distress the people will experience during years of drought and famine. Alternatively, it is derived from the verb *shadda ʿalay-hi* meaning 'to attack.' This latter interpretation aligns more closely with the subsequent description: '*which will eat up whatever you have set aside for them*.' According to this reading, the passage paints a subtle metaphor: these seven years are like predatory beasts, preying on the people, consuming what they have stored. The people offer up their saved food, which these years then consume, sparing the people afterward.

The term '*tuḥṣinūn*' means to preserve and save. The meaning, then, is: 'After those bountiful years will come seven intense years that will be hard on you. They will consume all that you had prepared for them, except for a small portion that you protect and save.'

ثُمَّ يَأْتِي مِن بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ عَامٌ فِيهِ يُغَاثُ النَّاسُ وَفِيهِ يَعْصِرُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

(12:49) Then after that there will come a year wherein the people will be granted relief (*yughāth al-nās*) in which they will press (*wa fī-hi yaʿṣirūn*).

The verb *ighātha* (from whence *yughāth* is conjugated, and derived from *ghawth*) means 'to aid', it can also mean to have a downpour. If *yughāth* here means relief, it signifies that the people will be helped by God Almighty through the alleviation of distress, lifting the drought and famine, and bestowing blessings. If it's understood as 'rain', it means they will receive rainfall, thus alleviating their drought.

This second meaning seems more fitting considering the subsequent phrase: '*in which they will press*.' One shouldn't be overly swayed by claims suggesting the first meaning of 'relief' is more apparent in the context of the verse, unless they read the term 'they will press' in the passive voice, in

which case it implies 'they will be rained upon' rather than '*they will press*'.

Some orientalists have argued that the second meaning doesn't apply to the context of the verse since the fertility of Egypt is primarily due to the Nile's inundation and not rainfall, asserting that rains have minimal impact there.

However, this argument is to be rejected, because the Nile can only flood due to the rainwater that flows into its channels from the lands of Sudan.

However, it's plausible that the verb *yughāthu* is derived from *ghayth*, meaning vegetation. As stated in *Lisān al-ʿArab*: 'And *ghayth* is the vegetation that grows from the rainwater.' This interpretation seems more fitting, especially when considering the phrase: '*in which they will press*.'

In the phrase '*in which they will press* (fī-hi yaʿṣirūn)'—*yaʿṣirūn* is derived from '*aṣr*, which means to extract juice or oil from something through the application of pressure, which as extracting juice from grapes, treacle from dates, or oil from olives or sesame seeds for consumption and other uses. Some have said that the verb *'aṣr* can also mean milking, as when one milks the udders of livestock.

The meaning is then that after this—the seven challenging years—their lands will once again produce crops, or rain will fall, or they will be granted relief, and they will press juices and oils from fruits and grains, or they might milk their livestock. This implies an abundance of blessings upon them, whether in the form of crops or cattle.

In his commentary, al-Bayḍāwī says: 'These are glad tidings that foretell good times after the initial fat cows and green stalks of prosperous years, followed by thin cows and withered stalks representing years of drought. The lean ones consuming what was stored in the fruitful years during the drought. Perhaps this was known through revelation, or by understanding that drought will end with prosperity, or because it is God's habit (*sunna*) to expand His grace upon His servants after a period of hardship.'

In his commentary *al-Manār*, Rashīd Riḍā has said: 'This refers to a year of great abundance and favor, in which people will have everything they desire in terms of blessings and luxuries. This information is in addition to the interpretation of the dream, as it is possible that the first year after the years of hardship and drought might not be as such. This specific and detailed knowledge was only known to Joseph through a revelation

from God and was not evident in the king's dream nor was it a necessary implication of its interpretation.'

What I believe is that these schools took a lenient approach in their explanation of the verses recounting the king's dream and Joseph's interpretation thereof. When we contemplate the words of Joseph in his interpretation, especially his saying: '*You will sow for seven consecutive years. Then leave in the ear whatever you harvest, except a little that you eat. Then after that there will come seven hard years which will eat up whatever you have set aside for them—all except a little which you preserve*', we see that he did not base his statement on the premise of informing them about what the future holds with seven prosperous years followed by seven drought years. If he intended that, it would have been appropriate to say something like: 'You will experience seven prosperous years followed by seven hard years that will deplete your stored provisions.' Then, if asked about how to mitigate this crisis and the means of salvation from this general calamity, he would have said, '*You will sow for seven consecutive years ...*' and so on.

Rather, He presented his explanation on the basis of specifying what actions they should undertake to ward off the impending crisis. He elucidated that his directive serves as a preparatory measure to evade the approaching famine and scarcity, as should be obvious. This is an indication that the dream seen by the king was a representation of the necessary precautions he should take to save the people from the catastrophe of drought. It highlights his role and responsibility toward his subjects: to fatten seven cows which would then be consumed by the lean cows, and to preserve the seven green ears of grain, keeping them intact without threshing or filtering.

It's as if the king's very soul had witnessed in the dream the actions he must take in response to the looming drought. The prosperous and famine-ridden years—the sustenance they will earn therein—were depicted in the form of cows. The first seven years of abundance were represented by the fat cows, and the subsequent seven years of scarcity by the lean cows. The consumption of their reserves during the second seven-year period, following the prosperous years, was symbolized by the lean cows consuming the fat ones. The imperative to safeguard their food reserves was portrayed through the dry ears of grain compared to the green ones.

Joseph's interpretation did not deviate from this schema, except in

three instances:

First, his exception when he said: '*except a little that you eat*.' This wasn't a part of the interpretation but a permission, clarifying the permissible extent to which they could use what should ideally be left in its sheaf.

Second, his statement: '*all except a little which you preserve*.' This referred to the amount they must set aside for the year in which the people will be relieved and press oil or wine, using it as seed grain and additional provisions in anticipation. It seems that Joseph took this from the king's description of his dream where he said: '*eaten by* (ya'kulu-hunna) *seven lean ones*.' He did not say 'they ate them' (*akala-hunna*) but rather conveyed their continuous action of eating by using the imperfect tense *ya'kulu-hunna*, suggesting they wouldn't completely consume them. Had their reserves been exhausted during the seven difficult years, he would have seen that the lean cows had entirely consumed the fat ones.

And the third instance is his statement: '*Then after that there will come a year wherein the people will be granted relief and in which they will press.*' It appears evident that Joseph inferred this from the recurring number seven associated with the fat and lean cows and the green ears of grain. His statement '*Then after that there will come a year...*', even if it foretells future events, it subtly suggests that in the year that comes after the seven challenging ones, the abundance of provision will be independent of people's special efforts in cultivating and storing food, and no particular directives regarding provision for the people would be necessary.

Perhaps it is for these three aforementioned reasons that the phrasing was in the third-person: *wherein the people will be granted relief and in which they will press* rather than the direct address: 'in which you will be granted relief and in which you will press', which would have maintained the same tone as in the previous two verses. This hints that people during this year will not require your exertion in matters of their livelihood or your management of their provisions; rather, they will be granted relief and press juice and oils due to the blessings and abundance of a prosperous year.

This rebuts the argument quoted above from Rashīd Riḍā in his *al-Manār*, that this specific detail was known to Joseph, only through divine revelation from God, and that it was not explicitly part of the king's dream, nor was it necessarily derived from its interpretation in such detail.

There is no doubt that the replacement of the drought years by a year

of fertility is something that Joseph indeed deduced from the dream. As for its exceptional bounty in comparison to other fertile years, there is no explicit textual evidence to support it.

From our discussion, an interesting observation arises regarding the omission of the number 'seven' when describing the dry ears in the verse: '*and seven green ears and others dry*.' It can be understood that the dream did not explicitly detail the years of abundance and scarcity but rather conveyed the practical measures that must be taken in response to these impending events. Hence, specifying the dry ears as 'seven' would be superfluous, unlike if it directly referred to the years of drought themselves.

Furthermore, from the aforementioned, it also becomes clear that the most appropriate reading of *the people will be granted relief and in which they will press*, refers to rainfall, the growth of pasture, and the milking of livestock. This interpretation aligns with what the king saw in his dream of the seven fat and lean cows, as this is the normative understanding. This context sheds light on the specific mention of rainfall and pressing in this verse.

وَقَالَ الْمَلِكُ ائْتُونِي بِهِ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُ الرَّسُولُ قَالَ ارْجِعْ إِلَى رَبِّكَ فَاسْأَلْهُ مَا بَالُ النِّسْوَةِ اللَّاتِي قَطَّعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ إِنَّ رَبِّي بِكَيْدِهِنَّ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

(12:50) The king said, 'Bring him to me!' When the messenger came to him, he said, 'Go back to your master, and ask him about the affair of women who cut their hands. My Lord is indeed well aware of their stratagems.'

This verse also displays the eloquence of the Qur'an through the use of abridgment and brevity. From the tone and considering the context, it appears that the messenger, who was the cupbearer, informed the king about Joseph's interpretation of the dream. After hearing it, the king commanded, '*Bring him to me!*'

Apparently, the news of seven consecutive years of drought was a grave matter. However, Joseph's evident wisdom and insight seemed even more profound and surprising to the king, who was deeply concerned about his people and the affairs of his kingdom. What the king had heard alarmed and astonished him. Thus, he ordered Joseph to be brought forth to converse and gain more clarity on the matter. This is further evinced by the

discussion that God relates from him, as introduced by the clauses, *when the messenger came to him* (12:50) and, *when he had spoken with him* (12:54).

Therefore, the king's command was not merely to bring Joseph as a prisoner but to release him from prison to that he might engage him in conversation. If it had been a mere summoning of a prisoner who would return to jail afterward, Joseph would have had no choice but to attend. However, it was a call for acquittal and release. Thus, Joseph had the liberty to attend and ask the king for justice. As a result of this assertiveness and inquiry, the king's subsequent command was: *Bring him to me, I will make him my favorite*, rather than merely saying 'bring him to me' again.

Joseph demonstrated exquisite manners in his address to the messenger, saying, *'Go back to your master, and ask him about the affair of women who cut their hands.'* Note that he did not refer to the wife of Potiphar in a disparaging manner. He merely pointed to the women who tried to seduce him, not mentioning any wrongdoing on their part except that which would vindicate him. The tribulations he went through were indeed profound.

Note also that the only instance in which he referred to them in a way that might be deemed negative was, '*My Lord is indeed well aware of their stratagems.*' This can be viewed as a form of complaint to his Lord.

Notice the elegance in his phrasing at the beginning and end of the verse, where he first says to the messenger, '*Go back to your master, and ask him ...*' and then he states, '*My Lord is indeed well aware of their stratagems.*' The phrasing he has chosen subtly conveys the truth. This should also serve as a clarification for those who claim that by 'my Lord' in his statement to Potiphar's wife, '*He is my Lord; He has given me a good abode*' (12:23), he meant her husband, asserting that he referred to him as his 'lord' (*rabb*).

See how subtle is his statement: '*ask him about the affair of women who cut their hands*'—'*the affair*' refers to the important issue they were preoccupied with when they did this. It means: 'What was the significant and grave matter that led them into their predicament?' It was nothing but their infatuation and deep love for him that made them forget themselves, causing them to cut their hands instead of cutting the fruit. Therefore, Joseph wanted the king reflect on the enormity of the trial of dealing with such infatuated lovers. To resist their advances, especially when they were

ready to give up their wealth and even their lives for him, is a monumental feat. Their persistent advances were not just once or twice, but continuously over days. Resisting and staying firm against such pressure is only possible for someone whom God has protected from evil and vice with manifest proof from Himself.

قَالَ مَا خَطْبُكُنَّ إِذْ رَاوَدتُّنَّ يُوسُفَ عَن نَّفْسِهِ قُلْنَ حَاشَ لِلَّهِ مَا عَلِمْنَا عَلَيْهِ مِن سُوءٍ قَالَتِ امْرَأَةُ الْعَزِيزِ الآنَ حَصْحَصَ الْحَقُّ أَنَا رَاوَدتُّهُ عَن نَّفْسِهِ وَإِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٥١﴾

(12:51) The king said, 'What was your business (*khaṭbu-kunna*), women, when you solicited Joseph?' They said, 'Heaven be praised! We know of no evil in him.' The prince's wife said, 'Now the truth has come to light (*ḥaṣḥaṣa al-ḥaqq*)! It was I who solicited him, and he is indeed telling the truth.'

Al-Rāghib remarks: '*Khatb* refers to a weighty matter that causes much discussion. As God says, *"What is your business, O Samiri?"* (20:95) and *"O messengers, what is now your errand?"*'

He also says: '*Ḥaṣḥaṣa al-ḥaqq* means that the truth has become clear because what is apparent has been uncovered. *Ḥaṣṣa* and *ḥaṣḥaṣa* are conjugated like *kaffa* and *kafkafa*, and *kabb and kabkaba*. *Ḥaṣṣa* means to cut something, whether directly or by issuing a decree... a *ḥaṣṣa* also refers to a piece that is taken from a whole, undivided entity, and this can be used interchangeably with terms such as *naṣīb*.'

The phrase, *The king said, 'What was your business, women, when you solicited Joseph?'* answers an implicit question from the audience, based on what was omitted from the narrative for the sake of conciseness. Everything is understood from the context. This implicit question is: 'What happened next? What did the king do?' The response is: 'The messenger returned to the king, relayed Joseph's words, and sought his decree. The king summoned the women and questioned them about their intentions regarding Joseph, asking, *, 'What was your business, women, when you solicited Joseph?'* They replied, *They said, 'Heaven be praised! We know of no evil in him.'* They thus exonerated him from any wrongdoing, testifying that they saw no fault in him when they tried to seduce him.

Their use of the exclamation, 'Heaven be praised!' (*hāsha lillāh*) is akin to their initial exclamation when they first saw him, '*Good heavens! This is not a human being...*', and indicates the pinnacle of Joseph's integrity and chastity in what they knew of him, just as he was at the pinnacle of beauty in what they saw of him.

Regarding the phrase: *The prince's wife said ...*, it parallels the statement, '*What was your business, women, when ...*?' and *They said, 'Heaven be praised! We know of no evil in him.'* At that point, the wife of Potiphar, who was the original cause of this trial, spoke up. She admitted her guilt and confirmed Joseph's innocence, stating: '*Now the truth has come to light! It was I who solicited him, and he is indeed telling the truth.'* She attributed the attempt of seduction to herself and negated any blame from him. She did not stop there but cleared him completely, stating that he neither responded to her advances nor complied with her in her attempts to seduce him.

This confession by the wife of Potiphar made clear Joseph's innocence from every angle. In her statement and that made by the other women as well, there are multiple emphatic expressions that exonerate him. The phrase, '*We know of no evil in him*' coupled with the exclamation, '*Heaven be praised!*' in their statement, her confession of guilt with the words '*It was I who solicited him*', and her testament to his truthfulness by saying '*and he is indeed telling the truth*' and other expressions in her statement all clear Joseph of any wrongdoing, inappropriate advances, or any inclination toward her. His choices were indeed impeccable.

ذَٰلِكَ لِيَعْلَمَ أَنِّي لَمْ أَخُنْهُ بِالْغَيْبِ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي كَيْدَ الْخَائِنِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾

(12:52) 'This, that he may know that I did not betray him in his absence, and that Allah does not further the schemes of the treacherous.'

Based on the context, this statement belongs to Joseph. It is as though Joseph is commenting on the women's testimony of his innocence, the wife of Potiphar's confession of her guilt, her testament to his truthfulness, and the king's judgment of his innocence.

This form of quoting speech, where the verb 'said' is not explicitly used, is common in the Qur'an, such as when it says, *The Messenger has*

*faith in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, and all the faithful. Each has faith in Allah, His angels, His scriptures and His messengers: 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers'* (2:285). This means they say: '*We make no distinction ...*'. Another example is when it says, '*Indeed it is we who are the ranged ones. Indeed it is we who are those who celebrate Allah's glory.'* (37:166).

Based on this, the demonstrative pronoun '*This*' in '*This, that he may know...*' refers back to the messenger's return to the king and his request for justice. The pronoun '*he*' in '*he may know*' and '*him*' '*I did not betray him*' refers back to Potiphar. The meaning is that Joseph had the messenger return to the king and asked for a judgment to be made so that Potiphar would know that Joseph did not betray him in his absence by attempting to seduce his wife, and that God does not guide the plotting of betrayers.

Joseph had two primary objectives for what he did, by returning the messenger and asking this:

First, to ensure Potiphar knew that Joseph did not betray him, so that Potiphar feels at peace and any suspicions or doubts about Joseph are removed.

Second, one must realize that a betrayer, in all circumstances, will never truly achieve his objectives through his treachery. In fact, it is inevitable that he will be exposed, for this is the divine ordinance of God that has always prevailed among His servants, and there is no change to God's modus operandi. Betrayal is falsehood, and falsehood is ephemeral. Truth will ultimately prevail over it. If betrayers always succeeded, then the women who cut their hands and schemed or the wife of Potiphar with her actions and persistence would not have been exposed. Indeed, God does not guide the treacherous.

The underlying goal of Joseph's statement, *and that Allah does not further the schemes of the treacherous*, is that by teaching this principle to the king, the king will necessarily realize that the Joseph is knowledgeable of this truth. Thus, if he has not betrayed any secrets and would never betray anything at all, he can be trusted with any responsibility, be it a person, a mission, or some wealth.

This distinction prepared the way for Joseph to make a request from the king, which he articulated after addressing him: *'Put me in charge of the country's granaries. I am indeed fastidious and well-informed.'*

The verse clearly indicates that this king is different from Potiphar (al-ʿAzīz), the husband of the woman, who is referred to in the statements, *they ran into her husband at the door* (12:25) and *The man from Egypt who had bought him said to his wife, 'Give him an honorable place...'* (12:21).

Some commentators have suggested that this verse and the following one are a continuation of the statement of Potiphar's wife: '*Now the truth has come to light! It was I who solicited him, and he is indeed telling the truth.*' We will discuss this further below.

وَمَا أُبَرِّئُ نَفْسِى إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلاَّ مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّىَ إِنَّ رَبِّى غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٥٣﴾

**(12:53) Yet I do not absolve my soul, for the soul indeed prompts to evil, except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy. Indeed my Lord is all-forgiving, all-merciful.'**

This is the completion of Joseph's speech in the previous verse. This is because his statement, '*I did not betray him in his absence*' may seem like a self-righteous claim. However, Joseph, a dedicated monotheist, realizes that he has no power or capability apart from that which he has been granted by God. Hence, he was quick to deny any intrinsic power or capability in himself and attributed any good deed or admirable trait that appeared from him to the mercy of his Lord. He equated his soul to the souls of others, which, by their nature, tend to follow desires and are inclined toward evil. Thus, he said, *Yet I do not absolve my soul, for the soul indeed prompts to evil, except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy*. His statement is akin to that of the Prophet Shuʿayb: '*I only desire to put things in order, as far as I can, and my success lies only with Allah*'

The statement: '*Yet I do not absolve my soul*' calls back to his saying: '*I did not betray him in his absence*.' He did not say this to exonerate himself or to self-aggrandize, but rather to proclaim the mercy he received from his Lord. He explained this by saying, '*for the soul indeed prompts to evil*', meaning that by its very nature, the soul urges man toward its desires, regardless of how numerous or grievous the misdeeds involved might be. It is ignorant to claim immunity from inclining toward evil, when one can only refrain from following its malign instincts and temptations by virtue of mercy granted by God, who diverts it from wrongdoing and guides it

toward righteous deeds.

From this, it is evident that his statement, '*except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy*', conveys two implications:

First, it limits the general meaning of the statement, '*for the soul indeed prompts to evil*', suggesting that the performance of good deeds, which emanate from the mercy of God, is also a natural inclination of the soul and not a result of external compulsion or imposition from Him.

Second, it highlights that his avoidance of betrayal of Potiphar was due to the mercy of his Lord.

He explained this statement by saying, '*Indeed my Lord is all-forgiving, all-merciful.*' In other words, he linked God's forgiveness with His mercy because forgiveness conceals a person's flaws, while mercy brings out the beauty in their actions. God's forgiveness not only erases sins and their consequences but also covers deficiencies and their repercussions. It is related to all kinds of flaws just as it relates to sins, as it is said: *But should someone be compelled, without being rebellious or aggressive, indeed your Lord is all-forgiving, all-merciful* (6:145) This is something we have discussed in our commentary on the quoted verse.

One of the subtle aspects of eloquence in Joseph's statement is his reference to God Almighty using the term '*my Lord*.' He repeated it three times in the phrases, '*My Lord is indeed well aware of their stratagems*' (12:50), '*except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy*' (12:53), and '*Indeed my Lord is all-forgiving, all-merciful*.' These statements imply a kind of favoritism shown by God specifically toward him. He praised God by associating Him with himself ('*my Lord*'), emphasizing monotheism by recognizing God as his sole deity, in contrast to the polytheists. However, note that in the phrase, *and that Allah does not further the schemes of the treacherous*, he used the name 'Allah', and thereby dissociating this from himself.

As mentioned previously, several commentators have suggested that the two verses— *This, that he may know that I did not betray him in his absence, and that Allah does not further the schemes of the treacherous*, and *Yet I do not absolve my soul, for the soul indeed prompts to evil, except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy. Indeed my Lord is all-forgiving, all-merciful*—are actually part of the speech of Potiphar's wife. According to this reading of the verses, when she confessed her guilt and testified to his truthfulness, she said, '*This ...*'—referring to her own confession of attempting to seduce

Joseph and her testimony of his honesty—'*that he may know that I did not betray him in his absence*.' In other words, she confessed that the attempt to seduce came from her, and he was truthful, '*and that Allah does not further the schemes of the treacherous*', just as He did not guide her scheme when she tried various tactics to seduce Joseph and imprisoned him for several years until his truthfulness and purity were revealed, while she was exposed and shamed in front of the king and the elite. Similarly, God did not guide the plots of the other women in their attempts to seduce him. '*Yet I do not absolve my soul …*' means she is not entirely free from evil, as she contrived to have him imprisoned in order to coerce him into obeying her wishes '*…for the soul indeed prompts to evil, except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy. Indeed my Lord is all-forgiving, all-merciful.'*

However, this reading is flawed for a number of reasons:

First, the statement: '*This, that he may know that I did not betray him in his absence …*', if it had been from the wife of the Potiphar, should logically be phrased as, 'So that <u>he should</u> know that I <u>did</u> betray him in his absence,' using an imperative form. Her use of '*This*; in this context alludes to her admission of guilt and her testimony to its truth. So, her saying, '*I did not betray him in his absence*,' if it follows on from her confession and testimony and refers to it, renders the statement redundant and meaningless. Essentially, it would mean: 'I confessed and testified so he would know that I confessed and testified to this in his absence.' Moreover, it negates the value of the confession and the testimony, as it implies she confessed and testified just so Joseph would hear it and be aware, not to unveil the truth and clarify the reality of the situation.

If, on the other hand, it stands as an indication of her deeds during his long absence, when he was imprisoned for several years, it means she testified and confessed only to convey that she did not betray him throughout his absence. Yet, she did betray him when she almost entrapped him, leading to his imprisonment for several years. Additionally, her confession and testimony do nothing to prove her complete loyalty to him, which is obvious.

Secondly, it becomes meaningless for her to tell Joseph that '*and that Allah does not further the schemes of the treacherous.*' Joseph himself had mentioned this when she first tried to seduce him, as he said, '*Indeed the wrongdoers are not felicitous*' (12:23).

Thirdly, her statement, '*I do not absolve myself*; indeed, I deceived him into prison,' contradicts her claim, '*I did not betray him in his absence*.' This is an apparent contradiction. Furthermore, her saying, '*for the soul indeed prompts to evil, except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy. Indeed my Lord is all-forgiving, all-merciful*,' given its profound monotheistic knowledge, is unlikely to come from a woman consumed by desires, and who worshipped idols.

Some scholars offer another reading of these verses, suggesting that the pronouns in *that he may know*' and '*I did not betray him*' refer back to her husband Potiphar. It is as if she is saying: 'I confess to what happened so my husband would know that I did not physically betray him during my private moments with Joseph in his absence, and that all that transpired was my attempt to seduce Joseph, but he resisted. Thus, my husband's honor remained intact and his dignity preserved. Even if Joseph is innocent of sin, I do not absolve myself from it, for the soul is inclined toward evil except for those upon whom my Lord has mercy.'

The problem with this is that if this statement was truly from Potiphar's wife, intending to allay her husband's concerns and remove any doubt from his heart, it would have produced the opposite effect. Her saying, *'Now the truth has come to light! It was I who solicited him, and he is indeed telling the truth'*, only confirms that she tried to seduce Joseph. But her testimony that he resisted her and did not respond to her advances counts more against her than in her favor. It might be possible that she testified in his favor to soothe her husband and remove any lingering doubts he might have. However, her confession and testimony would not necessarily give Potiphar any certainty that she did not betray him in secret.

Furthermore, her saying, '*Yet I do not absolve my soul…*' would then be redundant in light of her earlier admission of '*it was I who solicited him*.' The apparent sequence of the narrative suggests otherwise. In addition to this, some of the criticisms related to the previous reading also apply here.

وَقَالَ الْمَلِكُ ائْتُونِي بِهِ أَسْتَخْلِصْهُ لِنَفْسِي فَلَمَّا كَلَّمَهُ قَالَ إِنَّكَ الْيَوْمَ لَدَيْنَا مَكِينٌ أَمِينٌ ﴿٥٤﴾

(12:54) The king said, 'Bring him to me, I will make him my favorite (*astakhliṣ-hu*).' Then, when he had spoken with him,

he said, 'Indeed today you will be honored (*makīn*) and trustworthy with us.'

The verb *astakhliṣ-hu* means 'to make exclusive to oneself.'
*Makīn* denotes a person of rank and status (*makāna*).

The phrase, *when he had spoken with him*, contains another case of omission for the sake of brevity. The full meaning can be understood as: 'When Joseph was brought before the king and he spoke to him, the king said: "*Indeed today you will be honored and trustworthy with us.*" Restricting the decree to 'today' hints at the rationale for the statement as a whole—in other words, today, due to the noble traits that Joseph has displayed in avoiding evil, illicit desires, betrayal, and oppression, and his patience in the face of adversity in the quest for self-purity, combined with his exceptional understanding, wisdom, and rationality, he is deemed worthy of a special position of trust. The unqualified use of the adjectives '*honored and trustworthy*' suggests that the decree was general in scope.

Therefore, the meaning is that the king said: 'Bring Joseph to me; I will make him exclusively for myself.' When Joseph was presented and spoke with the king, the king told him, 'Today, based on the excellent characteristics evident in you, you have an unparalleled status and trust with us, and we will grant you authority over whatever you desire and entrust you with all royal affairs.' This points to the pre-eminence of Joseph's position with the king.

قَالَ اجْعَلْنِي عَلَى خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٥٥﴾

(12:55) He said, 'Put me in charge of the country's granaries. I am indeed fastidious and well-informed.'

When the king accorded a high status to Joseph by saying, '*Indeed today you will be honored and trustworthy with us*', he uttered these words without reservation or qualification. In response, Joseph asked to be put in charge of the country's treasuries, essentially entrusting him with their administration. The 'country' referred to here is, of course, all of Egypt. He did not make this request for any personal gain but rather to personally oversee the management of provisions and sustenance. This was so he could collect and store them for the seven forthcoming years of intense famine. He would then be responsible for distributing provisions among

the people, ensuring each received their due share without injustice.

Joseph justified this request by stating, '*I am indeed fastidious* (ḥafīẓ) *and well-informed* ('alīm).' These two qualities are essential for anyone who assumes such a position of responsibility. The king acceded to his request, and assigned the responsibilities he sought. This is evident from the context of the verses and the ones that follow.

وَكَذَلِكَ مَكَّنَّا لِيُوسُفَ فِي الأَرْضِ يَتَبَوَّأُ مِنْهَا حَيْثُ يَشَاء نُصِيبُ بِرَحْمَتِنَا مَن نَّشَاء وَلاَ نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾

(12:56) That is how We established (*makkannā*) Joseph in the land that he may settle (*yatabawwa'u*) in it wherever he wished. We confer Our mercy on whomever We wish, and We do not waste the reward of the virtuous.

The verb *tamkīn* ('to establish', conjugated here as *makkannā*) means to establish him as powerful, while *tabawwu'* ('to settle') means to occupy a place.

The phrase '*That is...*' at the beginning of the verse refers to all the previous events in the story, which culminated in Joseph's ascendancy in Egypt. For instance, Potiphar's wife had threatened Joseph with imprisonment, which God turned into a stepping stone to his attaining honor. In a similar pattern, when his brothers were envious of the affection he received from his father, they plotted against him, casting him into the well and subsequently selling him into slavery. However, this apparent degradation led him to be honored in Potiphar's house. When Potiphar's wife and the women of Egypt conspired against him, trying to force him into immoral behavior, God made plain his innocence. She then threatened him with imprisonment, which, in God's plan, became the reason for his rise to power.

The reference to the prison, his confinement, and the loss of freedom to socialize is evident in God's words: *That is how We established Joseph in the land that he may settle in it wherever he wished*. This passage signifies the removal of the confines of prison, which had deprived him of his freedom, and granting him the autonomy to go wherever he pleased. The tone of this verse parallels the moment when Joseph entered Potiphar's house and Potiphar enjoined his wife to provide him with a place of honor, wherein

God said: *Thus We established Joseph in the land and that We might teach him the interpretation of dreams. Allah has command of His affairs* (12:21).

By this comparison, it is evident that God's remark here, *We confer Our mercy on whomever We wish*, parallels His statement in that earlier verse, *Allah has command of His affairs*. The message is that when God wills to bestow His mercy on someone, nothing can obstruct His decree or prevent this mercy reaching its intended recipient. Had there been any force or factor that could negate God's will, it would have acted against Joseph, as he faced these insurmountable challenges. Yet, despite all adversities that seemed destined to humiliate and degrade him, God elevated and honored him. The ultimate decree belongs only to God.

The phrase, *and We do not waste the reward of the virtuous*, alludes to the power and rewards given to Joseph and serves as a beautiful promise to all virtuous individuals that God will not let their efforts be in vain.

وَلَأَجْرُ الآخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ لِّلَّذِينَ آمَنُواْ وَكَانُواْ يَتَّقُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

(12:57) And the reward of the Hereafter is surely better for those who have faith and are Godwary.

This verse pertains to God's chosen servants or *awliyā'*. It is a beautiful promise for the Hereafter made specifically to His allies, and Joseph was undoubtedly one of them.

The evidence that this doesn't apply to all believers universally is the subsequent phrase, *and are Godwary*. This indicates that such true faith is inherently paired with consistent, genuine piety. Equally, such piety cannot be realized without faith, as it represents a deeper level of faith and God-consciousness, which leads to God's guardianship (*wilāya*). God has said: *Look! The friends of Allah will indeed have no fear nor will they grieve. Those who have faith, and are Godwary. For them is good news in the life of this world and in the Hereafter* (10:62–64).

## Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, the narrative continues as follows: 'Then the king had a dream, which he told to his ministers, , *"I saw in a dream seven fat cows being devoured by seven lean ones, and seven green ears* (sabʿa sunbulāt)"—Imām al-Ṣādiq recited the verse:

*sabʿa sanābil* (with the same meeting)—"*and others dry. O courtiers, give me your opinion about my dream, if you can interpret dreams"* (12:43) However, they were unable to explain it.

It was then that the king's cupbearer remembered the dream he had once seen and recalled Joseph after seven years. This is alluded to in the verse: *Said the one of the two who had been delivered, remembering after a long time: "I will inform you of its interpretation; so let me go"* (12:45).

He came to Joseph and said, "*O truthful one, give us your opinion concerning seven fat cows who are eaten by seven lean ones, and seven green ears and others dry*" (12:46).

Joseph replied, "*You will sow for seven consecutive years. Then leave in the ear whatever you harvest, except a little that you eat*" (12:47)—meaning: "do not thresh it because it would spoil over the course of seven years. But if left in the ear, it will not spoil"—"*Then after that there will come seven hard years which will eat up whatever you have set aside* (mā qaddamtum) *for them* during the previous years" (12:48)—Imām al-Ṣādiq said: "It was sent down as *mā qarrabtum* ('offered up')"—"*Then after that there will come a year wherein the people will be granted relief and in which they will press*"—meaning there will be abundant rain.

And Imām al-Ṣādiq said that a man recited to the Commander of the Faithful the verse: "*Then after that there will come a year wherein the people will be granted relief and in which they will press* (fī-hi yaʿṣirūn)"—where *yaʿṣirūn* is in the active voice. He exclaimed: "Woe to you! What are they pressing? Are they pressing wine?" The man replied, "O Commander of the Faithful, how should I recite it then?" He said: "It was revealed as *fī-hi yuʿṣarūn*, in the passive voice, meaning "*and send down water pouring from the rain-clouds* (wa anzalnā min al-muʿṣirāt māʾan thajjājan)."

The man went back to the king and informed him of what Joseph had said. *The king said, "Bring him to me!" When the messenger came to him, he said, "Go back to your master, and ask him about the affair of women who cut their hands. My Lord is indeed well aware of their stratagems."* (12:50)

The king gathered the women and asked: *"What was your business,*

*women, when you solicited Joseph?" They said, "Heaven be praised! We know of no evil in him." The prince's wife said, "Now the truth has come to light! It was I who solicited him, and he is indeed telling the truth. This, that he may know that I did not betray him in his absence, and that Allah does not further the schemes of the treacherous"*—meaning: "I do not lie about him now as I lied about him previously"—"*Yet I do not absolve my soul, for the soul indeed prompts to evil, except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy. Indeed my Lord is all-forgiving, all-merciful*" (12:51–52).

Then *the king said, "Bring him to me, I will make him my favorite."* Then, when he had examined Joseph, he said: *"Indeed today you will be honored and trustworthy with us."* He asked Joseph what we wanted, and Joseph replied, "*Put me in charge of the country's granaries. I am indeed fastidious and well-informed*"—Meaning over the grain silos and irrigation wells. And so, he was appointed, as the verse says, *That is how We established Joseph in the land that he may settle in it wherever he wished* (12:53–56).'

**Author's comment:** According to al-Qummī Imām al-Ṣādiq is reported to have recited 'seven ears' (*sabʿa sunbulāt*) as *sabʿa sanābil*, but al-ʿAyyāshī narrates from Ibn Abī Yaʿfūr from the Imām that he recited it *sabʿa sunbulāt*. As for Imām al-Ṣādiq that the verse was originally revealed as *qarrabutum* ('offered up') instead of *qaddamtum*, this means that *qaddamtum* is used here in the sense of *qarrabtum*. As for the tradition from Imām ʿAlī, which says: That *yaʿṣirūn* ('to press') was revealed in the passive voice, as *yuʿṣarūn*, meaning 'to rain', this shows that he understood the previous verb *yughāth* (translated as 'to be granted relief') to be from *ghayth* ('downpour') rather than *ghawth* ('relief'). A tradition with the same meaning has also come down in *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī* from ʿAlī b. Muʿammar, from his father, from Imām al-Ṣādiq.

The explanation "I do not lie about him now as I lied about him previously" is clear when we read the previous verse, *This, that he may know that I did not betray him in his absence, and that Allah does not further the schemes of the treacherous* (12:52) as belonging to the speech of Potiphar's wife. This has already been discussed previously.

(2) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Faryābī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ṭabrānī, and Ibn Mardawayh narrate, via various routes, from

> Ibn ʿAbbās, who said: ʿThe Messenger of God (s.a.w.) remarked, "I am amazed by the patience and nobility of my brother Joseph. May God have mercy on him for when he was asked to give his interpretation of the king's dream. If I were in his place, I wouldn't have give given it until I was released. I am amazed by his patience and nobility, that he was asked to come out but would not until he had proved his innocence. If it were me, I would have rushed to the door. However, he wanted his innocence to be known."

**Author's comment:** This has also been narrated through other chains, including some from the Household of the Prophet, as mentioned in *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*. Abān reports from Muḥammad b. Muslim from either Imām al-Ṣādiq or Imām al-Bāqir, that they said: 'The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, stated: "If I were in Joseph's position, when the king sent for him to inquire about his dream, I would not have spoken about it until I secured my release from the prison. I'm astounded by his patience concerning Potiphar's wife until God revealed his innocence.'

This narration from the Prophet is not without its problems. I see two major issues with it. First, it sounds critical of Joseph's principled strategy and his approach to being released from prison. Joseph's strategy in this regard was impeccable. He did not merely desire to be released while Potiphar's wife and the women of Egypt had no goal except to seduce him. After all, it was him who said, *'My Lord! The prison is dearer to me than to what they invite me*' (12:33). What he wanted was to be released under circumstances that would prove his innocence to all, and where Potiphar's wife and the other women would be forced to give up their designs on him, and he would be given a position befitting his stature and status.

Therefore, while still in prison, he first informed them of what the king needed to do in response to his dream, which was to prepare for the impending famine, and the urgent need to store provisions, which led the king to say, '*Bring him to me!*' But when the order for his release came, he insisted on a fair judgment to be made between him and the women. This took him to the king's declaration, *'Bring him to me, I will make him my favorite.'* This is the best possible strategy open to Joseph for achieving his goal of attaining an honored position in Egypt and spreading justice and benevolence throughout the land. This is in addition to what became apparent to the king and his court about Joseph's incredible patience,

resolve, tolerance of harm for the sake of truth, vast knowledge, and sound judgment, as a direct result of this strategy.

Another possible criticism pertains to the Prophet (s.a.w.). God forbid that he would say that if he were in Joseph's place, he would have acted impulsively and not shown patience, even though he acknowledges that the right course of action was with Joseph in his patience. This would make his statement an implicit admission that he would not have had the patience in situations that require it. God forbid that the Prophet (s.a.w.), would instruct people to behave in one manner and then act differently from this himself. He exhibited patience and endured hardships for the sake of God both before and after his Emigration, and God praised him by saying, *and indeed you possess a great character* (68:4).

(3) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cites al-Ḥākim al-Tirmidhī's *Tarīkh*, as well as Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Daylamī, who narrate from Anas: 'The Messenger of God (s.a.w.) recited this verse, "*This, that he may know that I did not betray him in his absence …*". When Joseph said this, Gabriel said to him, "O Joseph, remember how you made for her." Joseph replied, "*Yet I do not absolve my soul*."

**Author's comment:** This meaning is narrated in several traditions with similar wordings. In a narration from Ibn ʿAbbās:, we read that when Joseph said it, Gabriel nudged him and asked, "Not even when you made for her?" In another narration from Ḥakīm b. Jābir, Gabriel asked him, "Not even when you loosened your trousers?" Similar narrations are there from Mujāhid, Qatāda, ʿIkrima, al-Dhaḥḥāk, Ibn Zayd, al-Sudayy, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Ibn Jarīr, Abū Ṣālih, and others.

As we have previously mentioned, reports such as these, which deviate from the explicit text of the Qur'an are to be rejected. It is unthinkable for Joseph to make a false claim by saying, '*I did not betray him in his absence*', and then correct his oversight due to a nudge from Gabriel. As al-Zamakhsharī mentioned in his *al-Kashāf*: 'False stories were concocted by liars who claimed that when Joseph said, " *I did not betray him in his absence* ", Gabriel said to him, "Not even when you made for her?" And the wife of Potiphar asked him, "Not even when you were about to take off your trousers, O Joseph?" This is tantamount to a slander against God and His Messenger.'

(4) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is narrated from Sumāʿa: 'I asked him about the verse: "*Go back to your master …*", he said "it refers to Potiphar."'

(5) And in *Tafsīr al-Burhān*, it is narrated from al-Ṭabrisī's *Kitāb al-Nubuwwa*, with its chain of narrators from Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā, from al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī b. Ilyās, that he heard that Imām al-Riḍā said:

'Joseph took charge of the food supply during the seven years of abundance and stored it in the granaries. But when those years passed and the years of famine came, Joseph began to sell the food. He sold it during the first year for coins, both gold and silver, until there was not a single coin left in Egypt and its surroundings except that it was in Joseph's possession.

In the second year, he sold them grain in exchange for jewelry and precious stones. By the end of that year, no jewelry or precious stones remained in Egypt and its surrounding lands save that it was in Joseph's possession.

In the third year, he traded grain for livestock and cattle. By the end of the year, no beast or cattle remained in Egypt and its surroundings except that which was owned by Joseph.

In the fourth year, he traded grain for slaves and servant girls. By the end of the year, no slave or servant girl remained in Egypt and its vicinity without becoming part of Joseph's dominion.

In the fifth year, he traded grain for houses and courtyards. By the year's end, no house or courtyard remained in Egypt and its surroundings that wasn't in Joseph's possession.

In the sixth year, he exchanged grain for farms and rivers. By the end of that year, no river or farm in Egypt and its surroundings was left outside of Joseph's ownership.

In the seventh year, he traded grain for their very freedoms. By the end of that year, no person, whether slave or free, remained in Egypt and its surroundings who wasn't in servitude to Joseph. Joseph thus possessed their free men, their slaves, and their wealth. The people said, "We have neither seen nor heard of a ruler endowed with such authority, wisdom, knowledge, and governance as this one." Then Joseph said to the king, "What

do you think of what God has entrusted to me in the form of dominion over Egypt and its surroundings? Advise me, for I haven't reformed them to corrupt them, nor have I saved them from calamity to be a calamity for them. But God has saved them through me." The king replied, "The decision is yours."

Joseph declared, "I swear by God and I call you to witness, O king, that I have emancipated all the people of Egypt and returned their wealth and servants to them. I also return to you the crown, the seal, the throne, and the diadem, on the condition that you only act as I would and only rule as I dictate."

The king replied to him, "It is my repentance and my honor to act only as you would and to rule only as you dictate. If not for you, I would not have entrusted you with this nor would I have been guided to it. My reign is esteemed and cannot be challenged. I bear witness that there is no god but God, alone without partners, and you are His messenger. Rule over what you've been entrusted, for you are esteemed and trustworthy in our eyes."

**Author's comment:** There are numerous narrations on this subject, most of which are not directly related to the interpretation of the verses. Therefore, we have refrained from citing them all.

(6) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is narrated from Sulaymān: 'Sufyān said: "I asked Abū 'Abd Allah: 'Is it permissible for a man to praise himself?' He responded, 'Yes, if he is compelled to. Haven't you heard the statement of Joseph: *"Put me in charge of the country's granaries. I am indeed fastidious and well-informed"* (12:55) And the statement of the righteous servant, "I am a trustworthy well-wisher for you"?'"

**Author's comment:** It appears that the 'righteous servant' referred to is the prophet Hūd, as he said to his people, '*I communicate to you the messages of my Lord and I am a trustworthy well-wisher for you*' (7:68).

(7) In *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, al-Ṣadūq narrates via his chain from al-ʿAyyāshī, who narrated from Muḥammad b. Naṣr, from al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā, who said: 'Our associates narrated from al-Riḍā that a man said to him, "May God reform you! How did you come into the situation you find yourself with al-Ma'mūn?" This seemed to be a criticism directed at him. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Riḍā responded,

"Which is superior: a prophet (*nabī*) or a successor (*waṣī*)?" The man said, "Of course, a prophet." Al-Riḍā then asked, "Which is superior: a Muslim or an idolater?" The man replied, "Of course, a Muslim."

Al-Riḍā said, "The ruler of Egypt was an idolater, and Joseph was a prophet. Al-Ma'mūn is a Muslim, and I am a successor. Joseph asked the ruler of Egypt to put him in charge, saying, "Appoint me as an agent over the treasuries of the land; indeed, I am trustworthy and knowledgeable." Meanwhile, al-Ma'mūn forced me into my current position." Al-Ridha commented on the phrase "*fastidious and well-informed*," explaining it means: "I protect whatever is in my hands, and I know every language."

**Author's comment:** His statement, "Appoint me as an agent over the treasuries of the land; indeed, I am trustworthy and knowledgeable." paraphrases the meaning of the verse. Al-ʿAyyāshī reported this in his *Tafsīr*. The latter part of the narration is also reported by al-Ṣadūq in his *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, and also from Faḍl b. Abī Qurra, citing Imām al-Ṣādiq.

(Chapter 12 continues in English Volume 22)

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## About the Author

The late ʿAllāmah al-Tabātabāʾī's fame rests on his academic works—the most important being his great exegesis of the Qur'an, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an.* It is said to be the foundation stone of the academic prestige which ʿAllāmah al-Tabātabāʾī was accorded in the Muslim world.

Among his other works is *Usūl-i falsafah va ravish-i riʾalism* (Practical and Philosophical Principles of Realism). This book is a comparative study of Islamic philosophy and various modern anti-Islamic schools of thoughts, especially Marxism. His disciple, the late Murtadā Mutahharī, annotated this work, thus making it easily accessible to the average man.

A third book, *Shiʿa dār Islām*, was first published in Persian; later it was published in English with the title, *Shiʾite Islam.* The ʿAllāmah wrote this book on the request of Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, to introduce Shiism to the West.

However, it is his *tafsīr, al-Mīzān* (published in 20 volumes in Arabic) which presents the true picture of the author's academic style and his way of thinking. In the preface to English volume 1, the author outlines his plan, to explain the Qur'an with the help of the Qur'an itself. This he faithfully does, all the way through to the end of the *tafsīr*.